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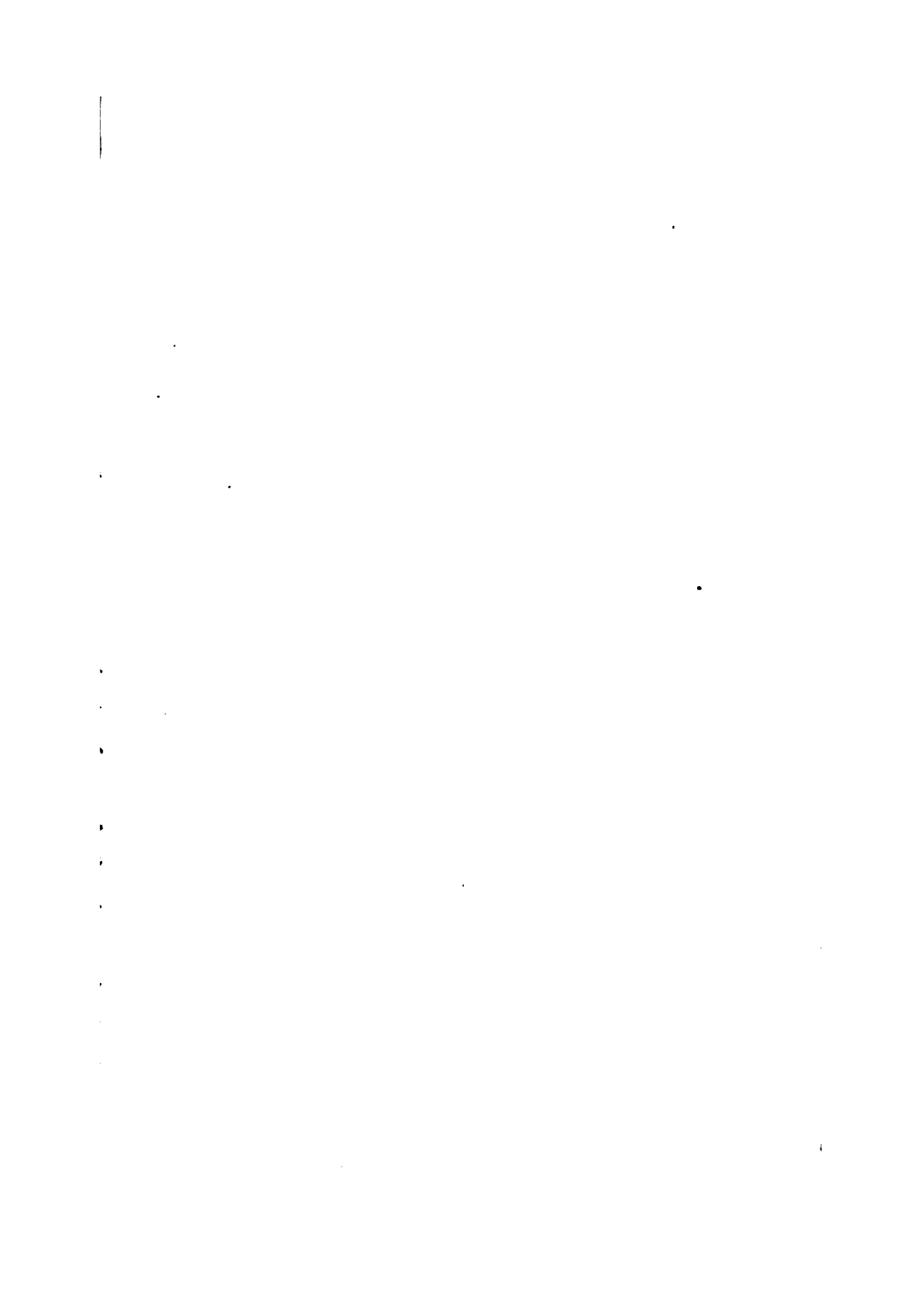
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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The author of *Marots* has confessed that he sent the manuscript of the story to his publishers with grave doubts as to the friendliness of the reception it would meet. Would American and English readers care for a story in which the point of view was at the widest remove from their own, for a story drenched in Catholicism? Would they be interested in Sicilian life and character as seen upon the great estate of a Sicilian nobleman? Would the life of a fair young postulant in a convent attract them? In the mind of the publishers, as of the author, questions like these arose, but the former answered them with a decided affirmative.

Readers relish novelty, and the strangeness of scene, character, incident, and sentiment in *Marots* provide a plenty of that welcome quality. And novelty is the least of its excellences; a strong narrative interest, originality of theme and treatment, literary grace and power, and a pervasive charm still more strongly commend it. For all these reasons the publishers promptly dispelled the author's doubts by accepting his novel. The book was to know no vicissitudes. Welcomed by the general public and by exacting critics, it achieved success—and this despite the fact that, for reasons which need not here be considered, it appeared suddenly, unannounced and unadvertised.

The heroine of the story, daughter of an ancient and noble Sicilian line, is a singularly lovely woman, pure without coldness, and one whose deep religious nature does not blind her to the human appeal of love and the joy of living. With this brief word of introduction, the reader is commended to the interesting story of Marotz's tranquil childhood in Sicily, of her convent life, and of her romantic experiences with her suitors.

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M A R O T Z

BY

JOHN AYSCOUGH

or
Bickerstaffe - New, France

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Dress

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JOHN W. WILSON
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Dedicated
BY HIS MAJESTY'S PERMISSION
TO
GUSTAF V
KING OF SWEDEN, OF THE GOTHES, AND OF THE WENDS

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CHARACTERS

MARIANO, Duke of San Vito in Sicily, father of Lucia.

ONOFRIA, Duchess of San Vito, his wife; Lucia's mother.

MARIO DI SAN VITO, their dead son: a disgraced reprobate, as San Vito's dead brother had also been.

DONNA LUCIA DI SAN VITO, Mario's sister; daughter of the Duke and Duchess: married to Hals, and mother of Marotz.

HALS, Prince Hals Nostitz, a Bohemian nobleman, son of a former Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in England, by his marriage with a Scots lady of high family. Married to Lucia; and father of Marotz. Piccolo's grandfather.

MAROTZ, daughter of Hals and Lucia, granddaughter of old San Vito and Onofria. Princess Marie Nostitz by birth; at her marriage, Principessa di Torre Marco, etc.; married to Rodrigo di Toledo, Duke of Revigliano in the kingdom of Naples. Mother to Piccolo.

MASO, a country cobbler.

CONCETTA, his wife.

DON ERCOLE, Paroco of San Vito.

ARRIGO, his nephew, later known as Pipistrello, "the Bat."

NINFA, his mistress.

SINIBALDO, an old butler at San Vito.

ZIA, the Contessa di Belgiojosa, aunt of San Vito, and great-aunt of Lucia.

LORD GRACECHURCH, a former visitor to San Vito.

Characters

RODRIGO DI TOLEDO, Duke of Revigliano, married to Marotz; Piccolo's father.

THE DUCHESS ROSA, his mother, a Brazilian lady of ample figure and fortune.

AN AMBASSADRESS, her sister-in-law, aunt of Rodrigo.

FABIO DI MAIORI, heir of the Prince of Positano, in the kingdom of Naples: lover of Marotz and beloved friend of her son.

POOR SISTER, the Foundress of a House of Reparation, in which Marotz is a postulant for five months.

SISTER HEDWIG	}	Reparation Nuns.
SISTER MECHTILD		
SISTER CHRISTINA		
SISTER MATHILDE		

SISTER MARY OF ST. VINCENT, a Sister of Charity.

ANCILLA, maid to Marotz.

THE CARDINAL OF SANTA CROCE, Cardinal di San Vito, the Duke's cousin.

CICA, a goat-herd's daughter.

PICCOLO, the son of Marotz and Rodrigo; grandson of Hals and Lucia; great-grandson of San Vito and Onofria.

A Court Bandmaster; a Sacristan; a Prioress at San Vito; Don Antonio, a country doctor; Ruggiera and Giuseppina, his daughter; Cesare di San Vito, or Padre Antonino, a Barnabite; Erennio and Carluccio, gardeners; Daria, maid to the old Duchess of Revigliano; Rosalia, maid to Princess Nostitz, etc., etc., etc.

BOOK I

MAROTZ

CHAPTER I

WHEN the great doors opened from the corridor leading to the private apartments, and the Sovereigns entered, Marotz felt a sudden quite unlooked-for emotion. She was not a girl with a customary disposition to tears. But now there came a peculiar feeling about her heart, and in a moment all the lights swam, in a crystal dazzle of tears that were none the less real because unshed. Her father, who stood half a pace further forward, turned his strange eyes for a moment on her, always expressive, face and fully understood. He was not irritated, as men so often are by the emotions of his womenkind. He had a good many himself, and was generally tolerant of other people's. In appearance they had scarcely any resemblance, but he had contributed his full share to her character. Close to them both stood the Princess, her mother, and the stale commonplace as to the possibility of their being taken for sisters was really not absurd in this case. They were peculiarly alike: and they had always lived together, which is apt to accentuate original resemblance. Marotz was very young, but looked less youthful than she was; whereas the Princess, who was really only

twenty years older, had paid scarcely any tribute to time since the girl's birth. They had the same figure, and nearly the same face: the difference being no greater than might be expected in the case of sisters; that Marotz would look, at seven-and-thirty, as young as her mother did now, was by no means certain.

The girl had an expression, at times, that is generally found only on the faces of those who are born to meet tragedy.

Even in that room, on that occasion, no two women were to be seen more splendidly beautiful than Marotz and the Princess Nostitz. And, in a surprisingly divergent style, the Prince was as handsome. He was a Czech, but his mother had been English, and he was altogether blond; a giant, with fair skin, wide-open, yet inattentive-looking, eyes of a blue so deep that one might have mistaken their colour, and hair that could only go with a complexion like his.

Marotz and her mother were dark as only, in Europe, Sicilians can be. But a certain brilliance in the clear pallor of the girl's skin was her father's sole contribution to her beauty. The hair, extraordinarily abundant, of both women, was simply black, as were the marked eyebrows, and the immense, passionate eyes.

Greek, Roman, and Saracen elements had long ago been blended into the type, found nowhere else in the world, of which they were triumphant examples.

Before the entrance of the Sovereigns the huge state ball-room had held a buzz of talk, through which a current of low laughter rippled here and

there. Then came a signal that their Majesties were approaching, and a wonderful, brief hush succeeded.

Finally the enormous doors were flung open, and the Sovereigns were announced.

Surrounded, preceded, followed by great officers of State, they entered; and the sense of unmitigated attention, the strained consciousness of undivided watching of those two central figures, became oppressive—a suspense.

The two Sovereigns stood still, side by side, for a deliberate moment, to receive the obeisance of their guests. She, who had been the loveliest woman in the world, was still the most august; the unheeded ruin of her beauty exacting a tribute from the heart that no present loveliness could have demanded. The monarch by her side challenged another, but not inferior, homage. The one idea, so obsolete elsewhere, of Royalty, was expressed by him.

One could not ask of oneself whether he had been anything else; whether they were right who praised, or those who blamed, what had been his policy. Or whether, indeed, he most merited praise or blame at all. Whether he had been great, or mediocre, in statecraft, sinned against or sinning.

One had no temptation to compare him with anybody else: to estimate his capacity; to appraise his character; he stood, a most imperial figure, at the end of the old order of things, an embodiment of Monarchy. Marotz watched, and a sudden poignant sense of loyalty, of deference to the ancient principle expressed by those two figures, of the terrible pathos with which Fate had crowned them, pressed the tears from her heart into her eyes. She knew they

would not fall, she hardly feared that they would be noticed by any one.

Though her father was, indeed, the subject of the two Sovereigns yonder, she could hardly feel that she herself was. All her life they had lived in Sicily, with, now and then, a rather brief visit to Palermo or Naples. She counted herself of the South: it was not that. It was the *idea* of loyalty to which she suddenly found herself bowing down, with a gasp of emotion, and the illustration of it here to-night. . . .

The Imperial and Royal Court Bandmaster gave his signal, and the Marseillaise of Imperialism obeyed it.

There never was so astounding a conductor as that fierce, small dark figure. Had he pointed his baton at a tree, music must have been scattered out of it, like rusted leaves in autumn. Had he called to the great Pan to come up out of Oblivion and play for him, the dead god would have drawn a reed from the oozy edges of the Styx, and lifted it to his long silent lips to breed harmony again.

CHAPTER II

TWENTY years before the night of that court ball, to which we must return presently, nobody ever went to Taormina. There were no hotels then, and no tourists. Indeed no visitors—which is different. But Prince "Hals" Nostitz, being his own master, and of a vagrant disposition, caught sight of it, as he rode through Giardini on his way from Aci Reale to Messina.

Probably he caught sight of Mola first, pretending to jump clean over its head into the sea. For Mola arrests the attention first, though Taormina wins our permanent admiration.

Prince Hals merely turned his horse's head to the left, and rode up the zigzag—narrower then—until he came to the gate in the wall of the little mountain town, that was a Greek town once, and had scarcely altered its name or its manners then.

There was no hotel, and he did not feel particularly drawn to the albergo that there was. But at San Domenico, which is an hotel now, he found hospitality. In the sunset he sat on the broken wall of the "Greek" Theatre,¹ and looked along to where the lips of Sicily and Calabria all but meet; looked across the dark iris-blue sea to where the southernmost Apennines

¹ A Roman theatre on the site and foundation of an earlier Greek one.

wove their incredible mesh of beauty, and caught his soul in it: looked beneath him at the leaping precipice, that was a steep ladder of beauty at whose summit he himself was seated.

He was there still when the night, and the White Queen of Night, had changed it all, but taken nothing away.

Being Northern, he felt the wild appeal of the South as no Southerner can.

Had no gods ever haunted, where all this waste of beauty was, he would have created them that night. As it was he had only to realise them with a devout ecstasy.

The classics were well known to him, as to men of his class they generally were then, as they are not now; but hitherto they had been merely a pleasure, now they became an inheritance.

His nature was passionate, as is often the case with indolent, spasmodically energetic men. He was apt not to do things at all, not to recognise that they were worth the trouble of doing; what he did do was done swiftly and irrevocably.

His father had been ambassador in England, and had there married an Englishwoman of the highest class. Much of her nature he had inherited, as later his daughter inherited much of his; with this peculiar result, that whereas he, a very virile man, had a certain femininity, Marotz, a most feminine person, possessed virile characteristics that might make themselves oddly apparent some day.

But there was no Marotz then—on that silver night of very late summer, when Hals sat on the

wall of the Greek theatre, entangled in a maze of dreams and fancies.

Next morning he rode inland, heedless of brigands, if there were any, into the tangle of mountains that lie behind Monte Venere. And in the afternoon he discovered a village with a huge castle overhanging it, in a steep valley, that was out of sight of everything but the sun.

If Taormina had tossed him, as a strong man is tossed by a stronger wave, back on to the sounding shore of those memories where the old gods laugh and play, San Vito thrust him irresistibly into the middle ages. They seemed farther back. Feudality has a remoter air than paganism, perhaps because we are all more pagan than we think. The feudal virtues are mostly obsolete, but the pagan vices survive considerably, in spite of "civilisation."

Prince Hals Nostitz went no farther than San Vito. He remained there for the rest of his life—until a month or so before the night on which, at the court ball, he had the honour of meeting you. One feudal virtue flourished robustly at San Vito—that of hospitality, as it is apt to do in all semi-wild regions where there are few visitors.

The Duca di San Vito was informed within half-an-hour of the arrival of a stranger, obviously a signore, and came himself to remove him to the castle. Very likely Hals had felt premonition of something of the sort. Certainly he was not sorry to leave the bare and meagre discomforts of the inn, though it was cleaner than one might have expected; but he paid the padrone generously, all the same, for the board and lodging that he had not had.

The castle proved fully equal to all that Hals had determined it must, and ought to, be. It was immense, and had been built at widely different times, by architects who differed from one another in everything but a frank disregard of convenience and a fixed regard for strength. No one had since ever tried to force it to be comfortable against its will: it had been often mended but never restored; and some parts of it were rather magnificent.

In the Rinascimento period a grand entrance had been made within the largest courtyard, and at the same time an interminable suite of reception-rooms had been fashioned out of about twenty of the old rooms. No alteration much more recent was noticeable.

The Duke was an eighteenth-century-looking person with a peremptory courtesy suggestive of good breeding that had grown too small for him. His manners had been learned thirty years before at Palermo, and for most of that time he had lived here in the mountains, scarcely ever meeting people that were not his inferiors and dependants.

He had been taught politeness, and it was his nature to be civil, but the trappings of civility were worn a little threadbare, and his large, dominant friendliness had outgrown them.

He must have been handsome, but at forty-five or fifty was older, both actually and in appearance, than an Englishman of that age would have been. Nor did he owe much to the graces of costume; only a fool could have mistaken him for a game-keeper, but during most of his waking hours he dressed like one.

The Duchess was delighted to see Prince Nostitz, and seemed as grateful as if he had ridden all the way from Bohemia on purpose to talk to her—or let her talk to him.

She seemed about forty, and had been married something over twenty years, all of which had been passed here in the mountains, except that, at shockingly wide intervals, she had been able to insist on a visit to Catania or even Palermo. The pretext had invariably been religious. Now and then it had been to make a Retreat (to retreat from these fastnesses of the hills to a peculiarly frivolous city did not strike her as humorous); once the excuse had been her daughter's first Confession, for which the Orsoline who had "prepared" herself must, of course, prepare Lucia; then Lucia's first Communion; then her Confirmation. On two several occasions she had obtained leave of absence to see one of her younger sisters "clothed," also in the Orsoline.

But a certain pleasant aroma of gentle worldliness seemed to flavour these memories. There had been much visiting, there had been the Passeggiata every Sunday and Thursday in the Favorita, and there had been even parties, and one, rather accidental, ball.

Hals did not find the Duchessa di San Vito a bore: it was his gift rather than his luck to exorcise a bore, as bishops do devils, and render them harmless, and even agreeable. People were always at their best with him; and he had no objection to there being a number of quite different sorts of people in the world. He did not expect them all to be made of the best materials, after the best models; he did not mind

their being less clever than himself, and, even when they were downright stupid, he good-naturedly allowed that perhaps they could not help it.

Besides, he did not have to consider the Duchessa as an abstract idea. She was merely the hind leg of the easel on which rested the presentment of San Vito and Lucia. No one could have been less grasping in the matter of identity. As a girl she had been content to be chiefly a daughter and a sister; and now it was still better to be a wife and a mother. In the latter capacity she was, indeed, wasted, for she had maternity enough about her for twenty children, whereas there was only Lucia. One other child there had been, Mario; and he it was, Hals knew, that had given the Duchessa's eyes their exquisite expression: it was not till he had known her some time that she mentioned their dead son; and he then understood their meaning.

Lucia was not specially like either of her parents, resembling, as Hals was informed, the Duchess's mother, who was still alive, having at her husband's death entered Holy Religion in the Convent of Orsoline at Palermo already referred to.

CHAPTER III

PRINCE NOSTITZ was walking home, after an expedition afoot among the mountains, and, as he passed up the village street, had stopped to exchange greetings with an old cobbler.

He was dirty, as cobblers often are, pushing this idiosyncrasy of his craft, however, beyond the reasonable requirements of *esprit de corps*. He was old, much older, apparently, than is usual even among cobblers, who are never young. And he had an alert, snapping manner that a nervous person might have objected to. Hals, however, was not at all nervous.

"Well, Don Maso! How does it stand?" inquired Prince Nostitz, standing still in the middle of the very narrow street, that wound itself steeply up the hill towards the castle. All the houses were approached by two, three, or a dozen external steps, except those which one entered by groping down fifteen or twenty inside.

"Don Maso'!" barked the old man, whose door had only three outside steps, on the top one of which he sat working.

"Is it not, then, 'Don Maso'?"

Hals pointed at a small board, obviously the lid of a grocery box, on which, in charcoal letters, was printed 'MASO CARBONE CALZOLAIO. This was propped against the cobbler's legs as he worked.

He made a peculiar noise in his throat, that was generally understood in San Vito to be Maso's manner of laughing, but was never accompanied by any visible betrayal of merriment, and, shifting his legs, caused the board to tumble off the steps at the Prince's feet.

"What is your real name, then?" inquired Hals, with unmoved interest.

"Real name?" snapped the cobbler, pulling a long piece of waxed thread through his dingy hair. He spoke loudly, though they were only a few feet apart; a disagreeable custom, like most of the customs Maso had accumulated in the course of nearly fourscore years.

"If it is not Maso," explained the Prince, who was quite aware that the old man had understood his question perfectly.

"Why might it not be Maso—if his Excellency permits?" retorted the cobbler, boring a hole with a stumpy old awl in the very dirty shoe he was mending.

Hals laughed.

"I have no objection. It was you who kicked the name into the dust."

Maso screwed up one eye, like a lizard's, and with the other peered into the shoe as if he suspected a scorpion inside it.

"What is the use of a name?" he demanded abruptly, apparently failing to catch sight of the scorpion.

"To distinguish oneself by, eh?" suggested Hals.

"One could distinguish oneself anywhere, whether one had a name or not. I should never confuse myself with any one else."

Whether this repartee struck its author as peculiarly brilliant I cannot say, but he clicked in his throat again, and spat a long way to the north, as if he considered that aspect of the discussion settled definitely.

"No doubt," agreed the Prince cheerfully, "you could identify yourself, even in a crowd, without such a ticket as a name round your neck. But it might help other people to explain whom they meant when they had occasion to mention you."

Maso scouted the implied necessity.

"They would say the dirty cobbler, or the cobbler with the rotten wife, or the cobbler who squints," he asserted instantly.

"But," objected Hals, "those to whom they spoke might never have seen you, or have had the pleasure of meeting the Signora Carbone, or they might have only passed you on one side and never seen both your eyes at once."

"Every one in San Vito has seen me—on both sides," retorted Maso.

"Not every one, however, resides in San Vito."

"Those who do not—the animals—would not know who was meant, no matter how many names I had. Do you think I am as famous as Garibaldi?"

"There would be no use in being famous if one had no name to be famous by," urged Prince Nostitz; then, conscious of the meanness of his argument, he added hurriedly, "Do you then admire Garibaldi?"

Maso screwed up his mouth this time, to give the eye a rest, perhaps, and replied frankly—

"He is—it is acknowledged that he is . . ."

"Well!"

"... a certain person."

"Good evening, Excellency," said Maso's wife, coming to the open door behind her husband. She was a singularly wrinkled old woman, with that perpetual expression of patient interrogation that is sometimes the result of intense deafness.

"Good evening," replied the young Prince; though she could not hear him she could see his lips. However, he lifted his cap too, and smiled with a comfortable friendliness that the deafest person could comprehend.

He guessed that her present extreme ugliness was but age's spiteful vengeance for a youth that had been splendidly handsome.

"If God had time to listen to my prayers," observed her husband in a disengaged manner, as if replying unaffectedly to a question on the subject, "she would be dumb instead of deaf."

As the lady could not hear, and Maso, in making this courteous observation, did not look in her direction but up into the shoe, which he held upside down over his head to make the process more inconvenient, Hals allowed himself to laugh.

Signora Carbone, however, immediately joined him, though more loudly and with a more undisguised merriment.

"Ah, he is wishing I was dead!" she giggled. "That is his way. Instead of saying '*come sta?*' like the other husbands, he says, 'How is it thou art still alive, *brutta bestia?*' That is his way, Excellency."

Maso did not contradict her, but he spat down the street, and hammered a dirty little nail into the shoe he held now between his leather knees.

Hals nodded and smiled, as if to show that he entirely realised her enviable position as the consort of so original a person.

"*Ecco!*" remarked Maso comprehensively.

■

CHAPTER IV

THE Duchess and Donna Lucia came slowly up the street from the convent where they had been to Benediction; and the young Prince joined them. They both had, for the moment, the same expression. One could see they had been praying. Only in the eyes of the Duchess that look, which her son's death had left there, was more wistfully apparent than usual. It was a look impossible to describe, and impossible to analyse, but impossible also for Hals to misunderstand. It entirely saved her from being commonplace.

She wore her sorrow inwardly, like a thorn, that was a relic, and that look of her eyes was the lamp burning before it.

Her son, and her sorrow for him, were not a memory, for they had never lapsed into the past. Hals knew that Donna Lucia had been also praying for her brother. He had been older than herself, and was only dead about two years. As all three now walked up the steep street to the castle, they talked of simple, common things, but Hals felt that the other two had not yet got their minds back into his secular atmosphere. The smell of the incense still clung a little to their clothes, and contrasted peculiarly with the acrid odour of leather and cobbler's wax that Hals still seemed to himself to be inhaling.

At the castle they were joined almost immediately by the Duke, and the unearthly feeling the younger man had experienced gave way before San Vito's robust presence. He was a good man, and respected thoroughly his wife's religiousness and his daughter's, but there was nothing supernatural about him. He believed all his faith taught him, but he took it for granted in the same simple way as he accepted whatever else he was assured was true, but could not understand. Thinking much about such matters merely puzzled him.

The life at San Vito was thoroughly simple, and seemed unaltered from what it probably had been in former generations. Perhaps it was not very useful, though Hals was not sure of that; it was, at all events, very harmless. No one seemed discontented with it, and Hals himself fell into it as into an easy habit, of which one sees no sufficient reason for breaking oneself.

No doubt it would have become speedily tedious to most young men reared, as he had been, in an atmosphere of courts and embassies. It never became so to him. At first it was more novel to him than the most stirring life of change and incident, and when it had ceased to be new it remained interesting.

The outside world retired into perspective, carrying with it all its importance; and among those mountains the poetry of the past seemed more real than the prose of the present. San Vito himself was no unworthy companion; he could talk of much beside sport, and had an intelligent memory. His knowledge of the people was like a gallery of rough but

sympathetic portraits, wanting neither in character nor originality. He neither puffed their virtues nor glossed over their faults, and some of the latter he knew to be, plainly, vices. But even these he took for granted, without surprise or much discomfort. That God had made people as they were, he assumed with a scandalous disregard of theology, but a most practical result of tolerance.

"The Sicilians in books" he assured Hals, "are generally absurd. Our people are not like that. A stranger comes here, and certain accidental or unimportant things strike him because he never saw them before. That is all he can remember."

"I am sure," declared Hals, "Sicilians are not like other people."

"What other people? Which Sicilians? Uncharacteristic people everywhere are like one another——"

"But your people have so many characteristics."

San Vito laughed. He knew they had. But, in spite of all that, he would not grant that his countrymen were like foreign portraits of them.

"You draw their portraits yourself very well," urged Hals, "but when they are finished, they are not at all like anybody but Sicilians."

"And the portraits foreign writers make of us are not like anybody at all."

Hals laughed in his turn, and the Duke added:

"They are too definite, too clearly coloured. No one is like that. Look at a 'Caucasian' in an illustrated Encyclopedia—was any man of any race ever like that? To illustrate a type the artist sacrifices every human resemblance. No Roman ever had a 'Roman' nose, and I've lived all my life in

Sicily without ever meeting the Sicilian of literature."

"I met him—one of them—this afternoon," observed Hals, thinking of Maso.

"I expect you dressed him up in the outrageous costume of your previous notions, and then corked his eyebrows."

"Who was he?" inquired the Duchessa, who liked to descend from the general to the particular.

Hals told her.

"Oh, Maso! He's not like a Sicilian, he's not like anybody."

Her husband thanked her.

"Onofria is right," he declared. "Maso is an eccentricity here, as he would be anywhere else. But you, who know no other cobblers in Sicily, erect him into a type. All the cobblers in your book about our country will be Masos."

"You must not write a book about Sicily," protested the Duchessa. "Or, if you do, there must be no chapters about San Vito!"

"All the chapters will be about San Vito!"

"It will be a very dull book then," laughed the Duca.

"Oh no," said his wife; "these clever people never describe people as they are. He will make us all interesting. I began once to read a novel which opened with a long description, and after seven pages of it I guessed the place was meant to be Rio de Janeiro, but it was Palermo, where I lived, as I found on turning the eighth page."

"You must, then, have been too young to be reading novels," observed San Vito, "and Lucia must not imitate you."

"There are no novels here to read!" the girl answered.

She sat, as a rule, almost silent during these conversations. But Hals knew she attended to them, and did not believe it was shyness that made her so quiet.

CHAPTER V

THAT Hals would remain at San Vito was very soon apparent, and also that he would marry Lucia. Her father had no objection and her mother was delighted.

Of course, they ascertained all about their guest, for they were eminently practical people; and there was nothing to discover that was either to his discredit or disadvantage.

He was their own equal in birth, sufficiently wealthy though a second son, for he had lately inherited his English mother's ample fortune and he was a Catholic. There was nothing to hear about his conduct, for there had never been anything amiss with it.

Hals himself intended to do more than marry Lucia; he intended to fall in love with her. Originally he meant to fall in love with her first, intending marriage to be the climax. But on second thoughts it seemed both simpler and more original to get married first, and devote the leisurely future to courtship.

It would be certainly easier. For, as it was, Lucia allowed him scarcely any opportunity for making her acquaintance, and none at all for making love. He hardly ever saw her alone, and if she said little to him in the presence of her parents, she said less on their rare occasions of *tête-à-tête*.

Men look on marriage as the goal and conclusion of courtship, women hope it is the beginning.

Hals made up his mind to try the woman's way of it.

There would, at any rate, be time enough in the placid sequence of years that must succeed to their marriage, years which assuredly would be spent chiefly at San Vito, for Lucia was the only child, and there would be no taking her away.

Though the girl scarcely ever addressed him, he had no misgiving as to the result of the love-making whenever he should have a free hand for it. He had never been in love before, himself; and he was sure she had not. But just as he knew that he really loved this silent, grave-eyed girl already: so was his instinct true that she would love him, and him only.

At first he had wondered whether she would ever marry at all. Before he cared, for his own sake, whether she did so or not, he had thought it possible that she might become a nun.

Presently he saw there was no chance of this latter, and by that time he had resolved that she must not do so.

He knew her to be both very religious and very devout. She was entirely without her mother's most innocent fondness for the "world," the cheery little world of Palermo or Catania. And he saw that her religion, her devotion, was deeper than her mother's, much more grave, much more silent and mystical. In spite of all this Hals speedily realised that Lucia had no "vocation" at all, and was certainly not destined to be a nun. Her nature was still, but full of passion, that stirred restlessly behind

a curtain of reserve, restraint, conscience. She was obedient, but would always be a law to herself.

The first great benefit of her marriage to herself would be the freedom it would bring her.

She had all her father's robustness of character, but it seemed hidden under almost all her mother's gentleness.

"Lucia is not like either of us," declared San Vito; "she is worse than you and not so good as me."

The Duchessa and Hals laughed, and the girl herself listened with a disengaged interest.

"She is like my mother," observed Onofria.

This was intended for high praise, as well as an honest expression of opinion. But San Vito was less complimented on his daughter's behalf than, perhaps, he ought to have been. He was not without a good deal of respect for his mother-in-law, and even some appreciation, but he scarcely liked her.

Long ago Onofria's mother had wished her daughter to make a different marriage, and but for the support San Vito had found in the Principe di Montegiove himself, the former was sure he would never have secured their daughter. It was true that the Principessa had yielded gracefully, and had ever since treated her son-in-law irreproachably.

Lucia knew her grandmother through her mother, and her own talent for instinctive apprehensions, rather than by ordinary intercourse, for the Princess had become a nun a year or two after her husband's death, and the girl had seen her only occasionally, during the visits to Palermo already alluded to.

"Lucia," said San Vito to his guest, when, a little

later, they were alone together, "is more like herself than like her grandmother. All the same, she has qualities that she never derived directly from Onofria or me, so no doubt we have handed them on from some one else, and my wife is perhaps right in thinking that some of them come from her mother."

San Vito, somewhat passionate in temper, was dispassionate in judgment, and seldom refused credence to a fact merely because it was not specially welcome.

"Is the Duchessa herself like the Princess?" Hals inquired.

"Very unlike. Her mother has more character. That's what my wife meant in saying that Lucia resembles her. Onofria takes after her father, who was an easy, popular fellow, not clever enough for the Principessa. She ought to have lived in the middle ages: and meanwhile was right to become a nun as soon as possible."

"I am glad she did not become one at first," laughed Hals.

"Yes, so am I. There would have been no Onofria then, and no Lucia."

Hals had his own idea of the Princess, which later on he had the chance of verifying. He pictured a woman handsome still, perhaps handsomer than she had been when young; dominant, of high conduct and high manners, and with a hard, but bright intelligence, with a bent towards the "supernatural" rather than the human, and perhaps less capacity for individual affection than devotion to a cause, or an ideal.

He understood San Vito's involuntary hostility,

and recognised that it was inevitable, but perceived also that Lucia's inheritance from her grandmother, whatever it might be, would be not unworthy and might be important.

When San Vito said that his wife's mother should have been born in the middle ages, Hals had followed that notion also. Some women demand a more spacious stage, and more dramatic opportunities, than modern life commonly affords.

CHAPTER VI

EVEN before Hals had himself recognised the inevitable result to himself of his meeting with Lucia, and that was before either of her parents really thought seriously of it, one unobservant-seeming observer had made up his mind on the subject.

It was a queer old mind, lodged in a quaint old body, shrewd and slow in odd proportions; the body was unwieldy, and one would have fancied the mind more so, but both arrived at their destinations none the less surely for frequent and considerable delays *en route*.

Don Ercole had been parish priest at San Vito all of Lucia's life, and for a good part of her father's; San Vito declared he had never known him any younger-looking.

"In fact," he would protest, "he never *was* any younger. *Si vede!*"

"Then he was born elderly!" objected Onofria.

"Born! How can you talk of Don Ercole being born? *Una mancanza di rispetto!* To be born he must have had a mother. I appeal to you, is it possible to imagine the mother of him?"

It really was not possible, and Hals and the Duchessa handsomely admitted it, though the latter refused to agree that the endeavour to picture Don Ercole's

mother would amount to an insult to her own sex, as San Vito warmly maintained.

"The only relation he *could* have," urged the Duke, "would be a brother, and *he* would certainly be a canon. How would that help him to be born?"

Lucia asserted that Don Ercole had a sister, but San Vito scouted the notion.

"I would as soon believe he had a son," he protested.

"Mariano!" cried the Duchess, scandalised at her husband's momentary oblivion of clerical celibacy.

But Lucia insisted on the existence of Don Ercole's sister.

"Then she is a nun," declared the girl's father. "One sees nuns like that, who look like old priests in fat cassocks. . . ."

But at this moment Sinibaldo, the butler, who was about the same age, whatever that might be, as Don Ercole himself, announced:

"Il Reverendo!" and the subject of their discussion became first audible and ultimately visible as well.

In build he assumed great latitude, but without giving the impression of fatness. Shapeless bulk was the idea suggested, and weight, inertly but doggedly opposed to locomotion.

He ought to have been short of breath, and perhaps he would have been had he ever hurried; the noise that had antedated his appearance was caused by his shuffling with his feet, and by his blowing his nose, which he always did very thoroughly before entering an apartment, as he considered it a defect of breeding to indulge in this relief in good society.

It is to be regretted that clearing his throat, so that you could not hear yourself speak, did not strike him in the same light.

Having blown his nose, somewhat sonorously, with his enormous checked blue-and-yellow handkerchief, Don Ercole had another ceremony to perform before, as Sinibaldo knew, he was ready to be announced to their Excellencies, and that his reverence now proceeded to carry out. From his pocket he produced a wooden box like a small tea-caddy, and out of the box he took a set of teeth, which, with slow deliberation, he fitted into his mouth.

Sinibaldo remembered when these teeth had been bought, and knew that they had been expensive, and knew also that they had almost immediately proved uncomfortable, and of less than no use for purposes of mastication. Nevertheless, he considered, as did Don Ercole himself, that they added a finish to their owner's appearance, and they certainly enabled his reverence to speak more clearly, so that for a long time their use had been confined to the pulpit and occasions of ceremony, such as visits to the castello.

The teeth were of a large size, and extremely numerous; the effort necessary to their adjustment seemed rather painful; but Don Ercole smiled as soon as it was accomplished, partly tentatively, to see if they were all right, and partly because he felt free to smile a good deal more now that they were in: without them he was not able to do much in that way.

Sinibaldo always understood that smile as a

signal. It was then, and not till then, that he stepped forward into the salon and announced:

"Il Reverendo!"

On the present occasion Don Ercole's appearance was more striking than usual. He had been suffering severely from earache, and his head was swathed in clean, but very complicated linen bandages, which certainly had some resemblance to a coif, and made every one, as he entered, remember San Vito's saying of there being old nuns who were like him.

When Don Ercole came to the castle at this late hour he usually stayed on and supped, and he did so now. He was not a greedy man, caring more for the quantity than the quality of his food, but no doubt he perceived and appreciated in some phlegmatic fashion the superiority of the diet at the Duke's table to that of his own. Nevertheless he did not betray this; he ate slowly and effectually, without appearing to taste what he ate, disposing, however, of a good deal of nourishment. In the same way he drank without, one would say, caring particularly about, or noticing much, the colour or the quality of the wine with which his large glass was filled.

Don Ercole had one accomplishment, and one taste or propensity: the former a very rare, perhaps unique, one for a Sicilian country priest, and, in the circumstances, as useless as it was uncommon. He had learned and taught himself a little English. The latter was by no means so distinctive: he had a solid, unwavering love of money. Apparently both accomplishment and propensity owed their origin to the same circumstance.

Some years before the arrival of Hals at San Vito, a wandering Englishman had, without specially intending it, found himself there. And, like Prince Nostitz, had been fain to take up quarters for the night at the albergo Trinacria. But instead of being able, as he had proposed, to resume his journey in the morning, had found himself laid up with fever, and much too ill to take to the road again. The Duke and Duchess were away at Catania, and there was no one there, on that occasion, to bid the traveller move himself to more comfortable quarters.

Don Ercole had, however, been informed; and speedily—as speedily, that is, as he did anything—betook himself to the sick man's side. At first his object was chiefly professional. The stranger might be going to die, and he might be a Catholic: as a matter of fact he did not die, and was not a Catholic. But before he got well Don Ercole had seen him many times, and found him perhaps all the more interesting for being a Protestant. No other Protestant, so far as was known, had ever visited San Vito. And Don Ercole had as little expected ever to meet one, and talk to him, as he had looked to hear of the arrival of an elephant, or an emperor, in his *paese*.

Although a Protestant, the young man talked excellent Italian, and had often talked it to the Pope—Pius IX. of blessed memory. Whereas Don Ercole talked Sicilian chiefly, and knew very well that he should never see the Holy Father. This Englishman was able to describe Rome in a manner that was quite new to him. He knew, of course, many people who had been there, and had come back

to complain of the prices, but they had done little more, beyond stating that they had returned, and that they had seen the Pope blessing so many thousands of pilgrims.

Don Ercole was altogether puzzled by the Englishman. It was odd, thought he, to believe in Gesu Cristo and yet not be a Christian. To be a Protestant and yet give the parish priest money towards the new gown Don Ercole wanted to get for the Madonna del Sasso in his church. They never argued, though they talked much. Don Ercole knew very well where Lord Gracechurch would go to—not when he left San Vito, but later on—but he never interfered in other people's affairs, and made scarcely any attempt to convert him. All the same, they became in a queer way very intimate, and, without exactly knowing it, the priest liked this intelligent, friendly Englishman.

When the latter was well enough to move from the albergo, Don Ercole invited him to the presbytery, and his invitation was accepted. On leaving San Vito, Lord Gracechurch gave the priest a hundred pounds, with a word or two of apology, so phrased as to leave him free to regard the gift either as a personal one or an offering to such pious objects as Don Ercole might choose to apply it to.

He kept it for himself, and that hundred pounds was the beginning of his love of money, and his subsequent propensity to save it. His wants being few, and his way of life simple, Don Ercole did not at all want to spend the money; but from henceforth he did very much want to add to it.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN they sat down to supper the party consisted of three gentlemen and three ladies, for the Contessa had joined them a little earlier. The Contessa Belgiojosa was a startling commentary on her name, for she was a hard-featured, tawny old woman, whose salient characteristic had never been cheerfulness. She was the Duke's aunt, and had been a widow always, as he asserted. It was really no harder to believe that she had been born a widow than to realise that she had ever been born at all.

The Contessa was not particularly devout, but she was very superstitious, and her love of money was not less acute than Don Ercole's.

Hals, who liked to think of impossible things, was given to wondering how she passed her time: for she never read, and seldom went out, spent most of the day in her own room, and yet had not the air of a person apt to sleep much. If she sewed or embroidered, no result of such occupation ever accrued. Her name was Giulia, but she was generally known simply as Zia.

"Any one could see," observed San Vito to Hals, during supper, "that you were half English."

Don Ercole could not prick up his ears, because of his bandages, but he turned a listening eye. Since

the days of Lord Gracechurch he had felt a certain proprietary interest in that eccentric nation.

"*Per carità!*" cried the Contessa.

"Zia thinks the English are all descended from Martino Lutero, and take after him," declared her nephew.

"Lutero was Tedesco," said Don Ercole, who had learnt that fact from Lord Gracechurch. "Is the Signore Principe in truth partly English?" he inquired, almost with animation, the animation of an intelligent tortoise in search of knowledge.

Hals explained that his mother had been an Englishwoman, or rather Scotch.

"The English are all like that," said San Vito; "no one ever sees an Englishman or an Englishwoman. They are always Irish, or Scotch, or Welsh, or Australian."

"But the Scotch Princess, your mother, could she talk English?" inquired Don Ercole, anxious to ascertain if the accomplishment had descended to her son.

"Certainly, and I also," Hals answered; "before I spoke any other language I talked it — in the nursery; I was born in England."

Don Ercole did not know much about nurseries. His own had been the street at Randazzo. He explained, however, that he, too, could talk a little English, and read some occasionally.

"I have a Bible," he observed, "in that tongue; and I read in it sometimes for practice."

"*Per carità!*" cried the Contessa.

"For practice," repeated Don Ercole, unwilling to give needless scandal; "that is permitted, Signora Contessa."

"Priests may do such things," said the Duchess in a low voice, partly to Zia, and partly to her daughter.

"I suppose Lord Such-an-one gave it to you," suggested San Vito, who had never attempted to pronounce the name of Gracechurch.

"No, he gave me only Shakespeare's History of England—he had not with him many books. It is, however, in poetry, not so easy to translate, and parts of it also are inconvenient."

"This English Bible then," inquired the Contessa suspiciously; "how came it to San Vito?"

She knew that priests were allowed dangerous liberties, as Onofria had reminded her; but if they took to importing dangerous books!

"Once at Catania I saw it," explained Don Ercole; "it was not new, and the man knew not what he was selling; it was better I should take it——"

"Yes, yes," the Contessa agreed. "*Any one* might have bought it."

"As it was in English," said San Vito, "it could not have done them much harm if they had."

"They might have learned, like Don Ercole," his aunt persisted. "They might have read it, also, for practice!"

She felt that she had been very sarcastic, and softened a little.

"It was not new," the priest repeated, "and cost only six *soldi*."

That also mollified her. The costliness of wrongdoing had frequently struck her as peculiarly offensive. Zia had often wondered why priests and

missioners insisted so seldom from the pulpit on the economy of being good: when you come to think of it almost all vices are expensive, and nearly all virtues cheap. Why pay money to be damned, when one can get to heaven almost for nothing? No doubt God had arranged it thus, that careful people like herself might the more readily be saved.

Meanwhile Don Ercole had been preparing a sentence in English which he now addressed to Hals, with extreme complacency.

"The female bull of God-with-us was before yesterday brought to bed of a son," he informed him; "to-day she convalesces."

Not being aware that Don Ercole's sacristan was called Manoele, or that the said Emanuel was the proud possessor of a cow, Hals did not quite instantly grasp the meaning of this announcement. But it did not take him long.

Even Zia was rather impressed. Evidently Don Ercole could really talk English, and though it was a heretical language, the people who spoke it habitually were, she understood, mostly rich. She supposed Don Ercole's learning it was somehow connected with his desire to be rich also. Her own love of money and the priest's were not at all the same. She did not so much care about getting more; what she could not abide was to part with one coin that she had. Don Ercole, on the other hand, wanted to be richer, and could often bring himself to spend where spending seemed certain to result in a further gain. Thus he had bought, quite lately, a blue satin petticoat for the Madonna del Sasso in his church, and it was already paid for twice over by the increased offerings

due to the fresh devotion stirred up by that highly spangled garment.

He had more than once been able to buy a little bit of land, and had done so, when fully satisfied that the property was cheap, and the opportunity a good one.

Zia could not have done that. No future gain could salve for her the pain of parting with actual, tangible money: could have induced her to take whole rolls of notes out of her beloved strong box and hand them over to strangers, strangers who, perhaps, themselves would spend and scatter them, so that in a few days nobody could tell where they might be. No; she could not have done that. She knew each of her notes individually, and had owned most of them for years. Some of the prettiest she kept separately, in special covers, made, a labour of love, by herself. The most crumpled she had ironed flat, with repeated ironings, with a cool iron.

But they were *all* dear to her. Certainly she had her favourites; the best mother allows herself a peculiar tenderness for some of her children; and Zia no doubt loved best the notes of highest denomination: but even the smallest were very precious in her eyes.

No one ever saw Zia handling her money; what lover can bear that profane, prying eyes shall witness his caresses of his mistress; but her caresses were very frequent, and very lingering.

Wealth in land or houses appealed to her scarcely at all, riches that should consist in scrip and shares much less. Nay, even money, if lodged miles away in some bank at Messina or Catania, seemed to her to have lost nearly all its charm.

If the lands from which her income came had been actually her own, no doubt she would have sold them, that she might feel their crisp value between her fingers. But her income was a jointure, and the estates that produced it were not at her disposal.

Don Ercole, on the other hand, kept scarcely any money in his house, nor in the bank even, longer than was necessary to let it grow to a sum sufficient for investment. One bank-note was the same as another to him, provided both were of equal denomination; and his fingers did not tingle as he touched one. Stock-scrip was more lovely in his eyes than money, and dearest of all was the sight of a productive field that he had purchased cheap. No accident, he felt, could happen to that, no commercial crisis, no financial dishonesty rob him of its fat increment.

Miser as he was, there was almost a poetry in the feeling with which he would gaze on a patch of land whose teeming plenty was his own.

CHAPTER VIII

ON the day when it became known that Hals and Lucia were to be married, Zia called the latter into her room and gave her a present. All the girl's life her father's aunt had occupied those two rooms, but only at rare intervals had she been invited to enter them. And only at rare intervals had the close-fisted old lady been moved to the offering of any gift. All the same, her presents were worth having when they came.

When first she had begun to live with them, her nephew and his wife naturally supposed that she would wish to pay them for doing so. And they had wondered how much she would be able to screw herself up to giving. But no suggestion of the kind was ever made by Zia, and they, as she very well knew, would never be the first to speak of it.

By the end of six months they had ceased to think of it: and then came Onofria's festa, on the morning of which the Contessa asked her to come into her room, where she gave her a beautiful old jewel. Every year since she had repeated the formula, and the present had always been valuable.

Onofria and San Vito understood it all perfectly. Zia would have loved to possess, and keep in her own hands, the money value of all these jewels; but to sell them would never have occurred to her as possible.

And though they represented a large money value themselves, the diamonds and pearls were not dear to her. Indeed, she almost disliked them, considering, as she did at times, how much good gold, coined gold, had been spent by some one upon them.

Zia had not much imagination; it was money she loved, not any of its equivalents.

All the same, it was not in her nature to part readily with anything, and her gifts were infrequent, and only imparted after long recognition of there being a necessity for giving.

Her annual present to Onofria was merely her way of avoiding the necessity of paying out money for her keep.

The present occasion was rather different.

"Come here, Lucia," she said; "I want to speak a word to you in my room. . . ."

And the girl entered, as she always did enter, those rather dismal rooms, with a mild curiosity. They were very large, and contained many beautiful things, things that both she and the Contessa knew to be of great value, though neither of them at all suspected how very valuable those things were. Still, they were gloomy rooms, and Lucia wondered how her aunt could be content to spend her life in them.

She stood still in the middle of the sitting-room, without caring to look closely at anything; noticing it all only in a general way. For she knew the old woman was suspicious, and to appear curious would have been a grievous lack of "education"—for manners are all that counts as education in Sicily.

Zia had gone into the inner room, where she slept, and Lucia heard much stealthy jingling of keys,

followed by the unlocking of drawers or cupboards. Of course, she knew that she was about to receive a present, and knew also that she would have to appear surprised.

At last Zia came back into the outer room, and presently the girl was surprised in reality.

"When you were born," said the old lady, "I gave your mother a trinket for you. She has kept it ever since, for it was too fine for a child or a young girl to wear . . . but no doubt you have seen it. . . ."

She paused here for Lucia to assure her that she had often seen it, and to repeat her thanks for it. About ten years ago, or more, she had been obliged to begin these declarations of gratitude.

"I gave you another present," Zia continued, "at your first Communion; a locket made of a large ruby, with a beautiful relic (authenticated by the Archbishop of Siracusa) of Santa Lucia . . . and I gave you another reliquary at your Confirmation. Eh?"

The girl reiterated her gratitude.

"And now," said Zia, "there's to be another sacrament." Her manner in thus alluding to the marriage of her grand-niece was grimly waggish. Spare and cheerless as the old woman always was, she never appeared so entirely grim as when these attacks of withered jocularly overcame her. "So there will be four of them—eh?" she observed.

"Five," suggested Lucia, wondering whether it was her baptism or her first confession that Zia had forgotten.

"*Certo!* You are a Christian *s'intende*. Five of them, and there are only seven. There remains

extreme unction only, since you cannot be a priest."

Lucia said nothing; and the old Countess began to open a large flat case of peculiar shape, covered with dull red morocco leather. A coat-of-arms and coronet were stamped upon it in faded gilt.

"So now," she explained, "that, in the meanwhile, you are to be married, I give you another present. *Ecco!*"

The case was open now, and she drew from it a splendid necklet of old Brazilian diamonds, cut, however, in the "*flamingo*" fashion. Lucia thanked her, and, though not a girl of fluent speech, her thanks satisfied Zia, who had known the girl all her life, and knew exactly what her words were worth.

"They are stupid things, diamonds," declared Zia, with a sincere sigh of regret as she tried to guess what some foolish forebear had spent on the useless jewels.

"At all events they are very beautiful," said Lucia, without any such mental calculation.

"Beautiful! They say the sunset is beautiful, and one gets it for nothing."

She eyed the gems almost malevolently, and her niece knew well that she was lamenting the extravagance of which they were the brilliant monument. All the same, Lucia was aware that much gratitude was expected in regard of them from her herself, and tried to pay her debt.

"Men are fools," persisted the Contessa, "and women too. All the things they say are best to look at cost nothing; but they spend their money to buy the things that they declare are less beautiful." Zia was philosophically alive to every folly but her

own. "Nobody," she continued, "tries to buy the sea or other things artists paint, but they buy the bad copies of them that the painters make."

It was a great pity, Lucia thought, that Hals was not there to hear Zia talking like this. She knew he would have been delighted. But it only seemed to make her own task of thanking less easy, especially as she quite understood that there was no desire at all in her aunt's mind of really depreciating her magnificent present.

"They are so splendid," she said again, "and so beautiful. When I wear them I shall always think of you, dear Zia."

"Because I am so beautiful or so splendid? *Per carità!*"

Lucia felt this was hard upon her. She knew she was not good at making fine speeches, but she knew also that something of the kind was exacted both by convention and by her aunt's disposition.

"It is beautiful to be generous," she urged, "and such a generosity as this is splendid."

Perhaps the old woman liked all the better to be called generous because she felt it to be untrue. Flattery is sweeter than praise to some of us. But she said:

"It is seldom wise to be what you call generous. It is safer to be"—("stingy" was what she meant, but she could not use a word so likely to be applied to herself, and substituted another)—"it is safer to be prudent."

CHAPTER IX

THAT was also Don Ercole's opinion, and at that moment he was acting upon it.

"To those whom God has given no sons," he was saying, "the devil gives nephews."

The young man to whom his remark was addressed laughed.

"If it is God who gives the sons," he observed, "to my father He gave me."

As the lad's father had been Don Ercole's brother, and a very respectable man, it will be evident to the reader that San Vito must have been mistaken in his conviction that his parish priest could never have had a brother, unless some ancient canon had stood in that relationship to him.

Don Ercole had also, though not very lately, had a mother, the wife of a chemist at Randazzo. And to his father's fairly prosperous business Don Ercole's brother had succeeded. But the chemist was dead, and before his death the misconduct of his elder son had ruined him.

That son had disappeared entirely beneath the horizon of respectable people, and Don Ercole would have liked this other son of his brother to disappear also, though not in the same direction. He did indeed disappear frequently, not, as his uncle surmised, up into the zenith; but, like an unwelcome, and perhaps

forgotten comet, would flash back again unexpectedly into Don Ercole's orbit.

That his return was always unwelcome Arrigo was, of course, aware; but he never allowed that knowledge to discompose him, or affect the frequency or infrequency of his coming. The object of his visits was not to give pleasure.

He was extraordinarily handsome. Nay, more, if beauty be independent of ethical worth, Arrigo was almost startlingly beautiful.

There is a statue in the Museo at Naples before which one sees men silent with admiration; but the statue has not Arrigo's long, curled lashes, nor exquisite shell-pink ears, nor rich, clear and pure colouring, at once dark and brilliant; yet it is as like him as if he had stood naked as the model for it. And, intimately, unceasingly, conscious of his beauty as the youth was, the statue itself could not have seemed more oblivious of it.

Even his uncle knew how marvellously handsome Arrigo was. But it only helped him to dislike him. Not, certainly, that the old parish priest had any jealousy of the good looks that his nephew and he were so far from having in common. Don Ercole would have thought it unpriestly to be handsome, a very objectionable irregularity from ecclesiastical usage. He knew a number of priests, and several bishops, and they were all as plain as possible.

He detested Arrigo's beauty on its merits, quite impersonally; indeed, all Don Ercole's likes and dislikes—what there was of them—were impersonal. He had no personal friends, and was not aware of any personal enemies. His friends were official or

local; his enemies he had never seen, Atheists, Carbonari, and the like.

"Why will you not be a chemist as your father was before you, as his father was before him?" demanded the priest, not, it was evident, for the first time.

"As *your* father was before *you*," suggested Arrigo.

"To me God gave the grace of vocation," retorted Don Ercole, resenting the implied suggestion.

"Oh, *si*! But to me not," urged the lad, with a bland meekness.

"*Si vede!*" ejaculated his uncle.

"Oh? It is a fact, but is it of course? I might have had it once and lost it; as Tarcisio had our father's gold watch and lost that."

Had Don Ercole *seen* that watch conveyed to the Monte di Piet  at Catania, he could not have felt more certain of its fate; but if he had ever been in doubt, his younger nephew's impudent allusion to its loss would now have told him.

"*Infame!*" cried the priest, at the mention of the vanished reprobate's name. If the force of the Italian word, and of Don Ercole's Sicilian emphasis could be rendered into English, they should be translated.

"He is coming back," remarked Arrigo pleasantly. His uncle hated his pleasantness as he detested his beauty. Nothing ever disturbed the youth's urbane good-humour, just as no one could deny his marvellous good looks. Don Ercole hated anything uncalled for.

"He is coming back."

Don Ercole said nothing. No news could have been so unpleasant, but that Arrigo knew it to be

so he was well aware. Perhaps, however, it was not true. He believed his nephew to be capable of saying anything to annoy him. Nor was the old man given to speech, speech without any object, so he held his peace.

Arrigo moved about the room, a habit he had which fidgeted his uncle, who disliked motion himself, and disliked also everything which was useless and unnecessary.

It was a very ugly room, full of ugly things which were not at all either useful or necessary, a fact perceptible to Arrigo but not to their owner, who was used to them, and approved of such things as were familiar and customary. There was, of course, a sofa, ugly and uncomfortable, but large and respectable-looking, on which, if he had been an honoured guest, his visitor would have been invited to sit. There were certain chairs matching the sofa and, like it, ranged flat along the wall. In the centre of the room stood a large table, with an immense bouquet of artificial flowers, made of silk and tinsel-wire, an offering from the nuns whose handiwork they were. Very ugly vases flanked the crucifix that occupied the middle of the chimney-piece, and in these were more artificial flowers of an earlier and dustier epoch than those on the table. The crucifix was moderately antique and of fairly fine workmanship, but one of its ivory arms was loose and hung down.

About a dozen pictures in tarnished frames relieved the green monotony of the walls; they were mostly of saints, badly painted and black with age and neglect. The faces were insipid, almost foolish, and the flesh-shadows were quite blue.

It was easy to see what Arrigo thought of them, and that he estimated them poorly enough.

Don Ercole cared nothing about pictures, and neither had nor affected any knowledge concerning them; but they were his own, and they were the sort of thing he was accustomed to see adorning the walls of well-to-do ecclesiastics of his own status.

Arrigo's expression, as he moved about, looking first at one and then at another, annoyed him.

"That Madonna," observed the youth, "if her head was the usual size must have been ten metres high, and her fingers were longer than my hands."

Of this criticism Don Ercole took no notice, and he tried not to look at all at the picture.

He could not help looking at Arrigo, and everything about his nephew exasperated him more. Arrigo's very legs were worldly. There seemed something scampish about his graceful, well-knit figure, and something fast even in his exquisitely modelled head; and his beautiful, refined hands seemed to his uncle capable of working all manner of iniquity.

"If," said Arrigo, moving away from the picture he had been criticising, "if she was the proper average height of a woman then her head must have been smaller than an orange."

"Abuse your own head," grumbled his uncle; "that belongs to you."

Arrigo laughed pleasantly.

"There's nothing the matter with it," he objected, without vanity, but merely as stating a fact that was incontrovertible.

"You mean outside, perhaps," said Don Ercole.

Arrigo laughed again, not less amiably. The inside of his head was all right too; if there was anything the matter it was lower down, where the heart should have been.

"You have a new carpet," he observed irrelevantly, something unfamiliar in the pattern catching his attention just then.

"It is not new," said Don Ercole.

"But it is new here? This one is blue with lilies all over it; I remember it used to be a red carpet with yellow roses."

This was true. But, as the priest said, the present carpet was not a new one. What had happened was this. A small farmer had owed him nearly eighty lire, and Don Ercole began to fear he might lose the money; but the farmer's wife was extravagant and liked smart things, and had quite lately installed a brilliant new carpet that had caught her fancy in a shop at Catania; after much pressure for his seventy-nine lire Don Ercole had consented to take this carpet instead of his money, not, however, intending to keep it. The Decana of the Sodalità della Madonna del Sasso was about to be married, and he persuaded her to give the carpet to the confraternity, that it might add to the splendour of the church on the occasion of her marriage, and also because such gifts on such occasions were not unusual.

So Don Ercole got a hundred lire for his new carpet, making a profit of twenty-one francs on what had threatened to be a bad debt; and he persuaded the Decana and Prioressa of the Sodality to give him the old blue carpet, with a striking pattern of lily-

heads, which, as it happened, they had always rather disliked.

"There was no carpet," explained the priest, "in the Sala di Pranzo, and last winter I felt rheumatism. That one with yellow roses is there now, and I made this one here."

His nephew was familiar with the local idiom, and did not understand that Don Ercole had manufactured it.

"It is not so ugly as the other—quite," he observed with temperate eulogy.

All the same he looked first at the painted pea-green walls, and then at the raw blue of the carpet, with an eye that was rich in criticism.

"It was a present," declared Don Ercole.

Those who are well off, and stingy, stand generally on the defensive as to any expenditure they might, perhaps, be accused of, lest their apparent lavishness towards themselves might breed unreasonable hopes of generosity towards others.

"I wish you would give me one," said Arrigo, promptly thrusting his uncle into the very pit he had sedulously been endeavouring to avoid. It is often thus. A too timorous caution is apt to be fully as dangerous as a careless improvidence of result.

"Give you a carpet!" cried Don Ercole. "Shall I not give you first, a house, to put it in?"

"If you like," said Arrigo, laughing once more, "but I did not mean a carpet. You said it was a present, and that reminded me I had come here to ask a present of you, my uncle."

The priest groaned. Of course he had known it all along, but a disagreeable circumstance is not

really robbed of its power to afflict us by having been foreseen. And Don Ercole was truly afflicted; but for his relations, he assured himself, he might even now be almost a rich man.

"Why should I give you anything?" he demanded.

"There is no reason," his nephew replied, thus showing some cleverness. Certainly he could have adduced no reason which his uncle would not instantly have demolished. Arrigo knew better than to rest his demand on any claim of justice.

"You consider me, then, unreasonable!" said Don Ercole, appreciating the manoeuvre and angrily resenting it.

"Not in matters of generosity," the youth replied, with a smile that was at once impertinent and sycophantic. "I have never," he added, "found you generous beyond the bounds of reason."

"It is money you want, *s'intende*," said Don Ercole sourly.

"Money would certainly be more useful to me," his nephew answered, "than, let us say, manure or a new cassock."

Don Ercole did not protest that he had no money. He was little given to protesting at all, and not much given, either, to telling lies. He achieved the required results generally by holding his tongue.

"I intend to be an artist," explained his nephew, pausing a moment before the mildewed mirror which reflected his own brilliant comeliness.

The priest took out his big handkerchief and spat loudly into an uncarpeted corner, having done which he blew his nose like a trumpet. His doing so was

almost in itself a statement of the estimation in which he held Arrigo.

"I cannot be a chemist," the youth continued, "but I could very soon be an artist."

"*Per carità!*" protested his uncle, with nearly as much emphasis as the Contessa Belgiojosa herself could have used.

CHAPTER X

AT this time Arrigo was about seventeen or eighteen, the brother who had disappeared finally from the horizon of anything like respectability being five or six years older. If Mario di San Vito had been alive his age would have been somewhere between that of the two nephews of Don Ercole, though nearer to that of the elder. But he, too, had disappeared, beneath the deeper horizon of death. And of those who had known him perhaps his mother alone could mourn that he was dead. His life had become, young as he was, so shameful that it had seemed as if nothing but his death could wipe out the shame of it. Secluded as the Castello of San Vito was, the peculiar seclusion of the life there was, no doubt, largely due to the circumstances of Mario's last years. The Sicilians are not a race morbidly sensitive on moral questions, but even, San Vito's neighbours had been horrified by his son's precocious shamelessness.

The Casa di San Vito had never been exactly strict in conduct, but the present Duke had an excellent reputation, and valued it. His son had parted with his reputation altogether, and the ruin of it had been the only sorrow of San Vito's rather easy-going life.

To his great, though unfelt, misfortune Arrigo had fallen under the influence of Don Mario, exactly

at a time when it might have been possible that better guidance might have led the boy along straight paths.

Who is born vicious? Arrigo, at all events, had still something left in his face which at least seemed to protest that he had not been born so.

His uncle's dislike of his good looks was, no doubt, a prejudice, but some prejudices are, in fact, instincts, and only unjust in so far as they rest on no demonstrably just foundation.

It may have been unfair in him to condemn his nephew's well-shaped legs, and delicate hands, because he could have given no account of his distrust of them. But it was an involuntary, not an obstinate or wilful admission of prejudice. An instinct as unreasoned as an animal's, but as protective.

Nevertheless Arrigo had not yet, so far at all events as his uncle knew, done anything startling to justify it.

He was nearly everything that Don Ercole disliked, and his character was already what no decent man could praise. But not much definite proof of evil had been adduced against him.

The lad was idle, restless, and almost without conscience; but he was, in fact, less dissipated than the old priest believed him. He was by no means grossly sensual, for instance. He certainly never ate too much, nor did he care for such pleasures as that. He had very seldom drunk too much either, never out of any particular taste that way. Moral he was not, for he was as free from the shackles of morality as a wild animal, but neither to any great extent had he been as yet what is generally considered immoral.

What was amiss lay deeper than actual conduct, which may sometimes appear accidental, and partly the fruit of circumstance; what had gone wrong was the character in which permanent conduct is rooted. He had scarcely any conscience left, and he was a liar, not a mere teller of frequent lies—he could, and often did, adhere exactly enough to fact in statement—but utterly untrue. He had almost reached already, at seventeen and a half, the point at which the belief in what is true is itself unwelcome.

And he was dishonest.

In this respect Don Ercole's surly instinct was correct and genuine.

I do not say that in every conceivable instance one would have been betrayed had one trusted him, for he was not a monster, but a very nearly worthless young man. But, what was almost worse as a symptom, he would have himself inwardly derided any one who did trust him.

The evil done to him by Don Mario di San Vito and by his own elder brother was not the mere vulgar easy result of outward example, but the much more fatal contagion of intrinsic character. Oddly enough he had copied their obvious vices a great deal less than his uncle, for instance, took for granted. But he had corrupted, by sympathy, as one uninjured ear may become deaf where the other has actually been deprived of the mechanism whereby hearing is produced.

Mario di San Vito and Tarcisio had murdered his character, and the murder was not the less horrible because their victim did not himself resent it.

Does a murdered man know of his own destruction

and hate his destroyer? We know not. But Arrigo had certainly not hated the two men by whose influence he had been destroyed.

"I wish," he said straightforwardly enough, at all events, stopping opposite his uncle in his fidgeting walk up and down the room, "I wish you would let me be an artist."

"I let you! It is not I that can make you an artist."

"I can make myself one, but to do so I want money."

"I thought so," declared Don Ercole, not very good-naturedly.

"Well, then, you were right," and Arrigo's smile was very good-natured indeed. He had no objection at all to his uncle's hugging himself with the reflection that he had been a prophet. As generally practised it is an easy art, but Arrigo did not grudge his uncle whatever glory he might get out of it.

"You always do want money," said the priest.

"I certainly always want more than I can get," admitted his nephew.

"Why should you get any? I am not your father."

"*Per carità!* No; that would be a scandal," laughed Arrigo, with cheerful flippancy.

Don Ercole scowled. He took himself and his priestly dignity very seriously, or, one might say, solidly, and the young man's airy impertinence was insufferable to him.

Almost everything that his nephew said seemed to him about the most disagreeable thing that he could say.

As Arrigo was quite aware of this it may seem

surprising that he did not take more pains to avoid offence. His visits, as has been stated, were not designed to give pleasure, but as they were intended to achieve an object, profitable to himself, would it not have been better policy to strive after greater agreeability?

Arrigo thought not. He had certainly no hope of obtaining anything from his uncle's affection, which he knew did not exist, or even from his goodwill, which was at least problematical. But to get rid of him, even temporarily, Don Ercole would do something; and Arrigo almost thought that the sooner he exasperated his uncle out of all bearing the sooner was he likely to get whatever was to be wrung from him.

He took it for granted that Don Ercole hated him, not because he himself hated his uncle, which he did not, but because he perceived that his uncle undoubtedly hated his company. As a matter of fact the priest was not generous in love or hate, and perhaps really loved no one and really hated no one. But every characteristic of some people was certainly odious to him.

Don Ercole's ugly room looked straight down to the mouth of the twisted, fierce-looking valley, beyond which no one could easily guess at what distance loomed the monstrous weird bulk of Mongibello. Sometimes one would say that Etna was almost near, often it would soar away into aerial regions, where earth's measurements lose all meaning and applicability.

The window framing that view made the only decent picture in the room, and opposite it Arrigo

stood still oftener and longer than before the others; had Don Ercole been able then to see his eyes he would have seen in them an expression that he could never have translated.

The soul of an artist is not always the soul of a good man, but like a man's soul it also may be lost or saved.

If Hals could have seen Arrigo, as he gazed down the valley, the artist-soul at least might have been saved. But no such expression, it may be feared, would have softened Don Ercole's frigid old heart. Prudence was his favourite virtue, and the prudence that he had grown to treasure was twin sister of distrust.

CHAPTER XI

HALS and Lucia were married, and their long courtship began immediately; it had not ended on that night with which our story opened, when they stood beside Marotz and watched her face as the Imperial and Royal Court Bandmaster gave his signal, and the huge ball-room began to shiver to the pulses of a hundred violins.

Through them all one felt the quivering of the one violin in the weird hands of the Imperial and Royal Court Bandmaster himself.

He was a strange black, small man, and his music was strange and dark, and full of question like himself.

As Marotz danced she felt his influence, as it seldom was felt, as he himself knew it scarcely ever was felt.

Of her first partner she thought scarcely at all. He danced perfectly, as did she, and talked very little.

She knew him a little already, and he was in every way a partner worthy of her. He was as handsome as a man could be without provoking one to ask if he were not too handsome, and he was clever too. He was young, and of birth as distinguished as her own.

Then he was almost a compatriot, for his father had been an Italian of the south, like her own mother,

and his mother an Austrian, whose father had married an Englishwoman. Marotz was very conscious of her share in all these nationalities. By birth and breeding she was Sicilian, but she never forgot the northern stream in her blood, nor would it let itself be forgotten. Her dancing was not mechanical, but it was spontaneous, and needed no thought and no attention; it was like breathing, like the flow of her blood, like the rhythm of a pulse.

She hardly thought at all of her partner, who was thinking of nothing but her. Chiefly she thought of the music and of the ugly little dark man who was guiding it.

More than once he saw her face, and once their eyes met; then his violin answered her, clearer than before, and its passionate sad sermon preached more terribly than before.

His music was outwardly sensuous, worldly, devised one would say for a mere accompaniment to dancing feet: an exquisite and supreme flattery of youth and pleasure, a pleading of Time's cause against Eternity, it was flung like prodigal, sweet flowers beneath their feet.

But Marotz heard the sneer that was beneath the smile, and felt the prick of each thorn that hid within the flowers. Pleasure, it cried to her, is the cheating preface of pain, youth is the prologue to dull age, time is but a silly porch of inexorable eternity, life the blind infancy of death.

Hals also saw her face as time and again she passed swiftly near him. Lucia saw it too, and, understanding less, nevertheless felt an inexplicable misgiving.

Her own nature was deeper than her husband's, though intellectually she believed him to be far above herself. Marotz was beyond her.

She remembered her own still youth, and wondered if her daughter's would be still. The girl was even more reserved than she had been, but there was more to reserve. The mystic element in herself had been absorbed by her marriage, in Marotz it was much more pronounced and might absorb all the rest. It did not seem natural to her that a girl at a splendid ball should wear a look like that. Hals, with a nature less deep, had a readier instinct of appreciation, and was scarcely surprised at all. What would have surprised him would have been that Marotz on such an occasion should be like any other girl.

Presently she came back to them and her partner drew away.

"Well?" said Hals lightly.

"How do you find it all?" asked her mother.

"I don't know," the girl answered truthfully.

"You never will," said her father.

Lucia hardly liked his saying this. And he at once felt it. There was an entire sympathy between them, as far as there could be between two people who would never quite understand each other. Hals was imaginative and realistic, Lucia with a less vagrant imagination, was more "supernatural." He was still half pagan, she entirely Catholic. His thoughts were wider than hers, hers much deeper than his.

"It is almost your first ball," she said to Marotz, partly as though offering excuse for it; "perhaps it seems strange."

"Yes; it is strange."

She was asking herself if she was happy. And both father and mother saw the question in her face. She was quite uncertain yet as to whether she were too happy or not happy at all. Should she presently get merely used to it, like other girls? She felt as if either it would become hateful, or so intoxicating that she must yield herself to it altogether.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Marotz danced next it was with another partner, and the former already grudged her to him.

Neither of these two were strangers to her; at all events she had known them both a little, and had danced before with both. And one was about as interesting to her as the other. This does not mean that Marotz was not interested much by either, for she found almost all her fellow-creatures worthy of her interest.

At San Vito she knew every one, from her grandfather down to the children in the steep street, and each had been given the homage of her attention. Every drop in the deep and wide stream of life shared in her reverent, silent interest. Was not she herself only one other drop in it?

Nor were her interests merely human, they were separate, distinct, definite, and individual. But until to-night neither of these two young men had claimed from her anything special.

Her first partner, Don Fabio Maiori, the elder son of the Principe di Positano, was, as has been said, in a peculiar way a compatriot, being a Southern Italian with Austrian and English blood; her second was also of mixed nationality, though without any northern tinge in his veins. His father being dead, he was already Duca di Revigliano, and his family

had for over two centuries been settled in "the Regno"; nevertheless, they were Spaniards by descent, and had the Spanish surname of Toledo, once very illustrious in Naples. The young man's mother had been South American, enormously wealthy, and heiress of a certain Dom Pedro di Alcantara do Amaral. Whether this lady's ancestors were all noble I cannot tell; but if they were all Europeans they must have been peculiarly dark for natives of that part of the globe. Neither the late nor present Duke of Revigliano ever spoke of them; but they were both very glad of the huge fortune the Brazilian Duchess had brought, whereby the somewhat depressed Toledo finances had been renewed almost to their pristine vigour. No Toledo for some considerable time had ever been noted for much beyond his name. If they had not achieved anything particularly notorious it may be remembered that until recently they had rather lacked the opportunity.

Nevertheless, they were big people in the South, and now that they again had liberal command of money were fully recognized as very big people indeed. Personally the present Duke was not particularly big. He was not much above the medium stature, and was almost too slim. He was, however, handsome in spite of his mother, whom he resembled unfortunately in the extreme darkness of his complexion.

In his way he was clever, which the South American Duchess was not; and he was extremely distinguished in manner and bearing, which must have been another inheritance from his father. That stout lady the Duchessa was ignorant and super-

ficially devout. Her son was neither; she, however, was a good-tempered, kindly creature, whom everybody liked, and who certainly had never injured any one in her life. Whether Rodrigo was likely to be so harmless is another question; he was not yet much loved by any one, though plenty of Neapolitan mammas were strongly of opinion that their daughters might learn to love him, and half the young men of Naples in his own circle would have been perfectly ready to accord him whatever degree of affection is appropriate for a brother-in-law. Meanwhile they did not consider him either kindly or good-tempered.

The Duca di Revigliano had an aunt, still a youngish woman, whose husband was Italian Ambassador to the Sovereign whose entrance, on this occasion of the State ball, has been described. With her the young man was staying, and by her he had been introduced before to-night to the parents of Marotz; the Ambassadors had fully instructed her nephew as to the antecedents and position of the families of Hals and Lucia.

"This girl," she had explained, "whom you can see for yourself is most beautiful, is the only child, and bound to be as rich as a Jewess."

"I hope she is not a Jewess, though!" said Rodrigo.

"Oh no! Her father's people are great folks here, and he has great wealth, for his elder brother died without children, and he himself had a good fortune from his mother. The San Vito are rich also, and own about nine mountains in Sicily."

"With something on them besides, Maffèusi, I hope!"

"*Certo!* They are the lords of twenty paesi; and this girl, 'Marotz,' as they call her, will have it all. There was a brother, a terrible person, who got killed; and her mother had also a brother, another terrible person, but he also got killed, or died. Only the respectable ones survive in that family."

"It is generally the other way. But, unless one meant to be very respectable too, one had better not, perhaps, belong to them. It sounds dangerous."

"Of course you mean to be respectable."

Her Excellency spoke very decidedly; but her nephew fancied that in her tone he detected the slightest possible note of interrogation.

"Of course!" he said, laughing. "One always does. If one is not respectable it is an accident."

"Accidents should not happen," retorted the lady; "they never need."

Meanwhile Rodrigo did not forget that Marotz was an heiress. His aunt took care that he should not. As her family had taken latterly to marrying money, she thought it might as well become a habit. She had married a rich man herself, and had found the comfort of it.

As for the young Duke, he knew he could afford to please himself; and he certainly would not have to marry a Chilian or Peruvian of problematic descent, stumpy figure, and mediocre attractions; he knew he would not marry such an one though she had twice the wealth of his mother. But Marotz was beautiful, and he had wit enough to see that she had other charms as well. It would, obviously, be no disadvantage that she should be richly endowed by fortune as well as nature.

CHAPTER XIII

MAROTZ and Rodrigo were together, and alone, though almost within sight and sound were hundreds of fellow-revellers. Fellow-revellers! Would any one have called Marotz a reveller who could have known all that she felt and thought?

The girl and the young man stood in a wide marble balcony, behind them hung an immense curtain of looped arras, half closing an arch with gilded capitals; beyond that was a great hall paved with shining marble, set about with palms and screens and little tables and lounge seats, where numbers of their fellow-guests sat; and in front, beneath them, lay the moonlit alleys of a garden.

There was no wind, but a soft shudder stirred the trees now and then; and in the sky there were no clouds to veil the brilliant cold splendour of the moon. The garden was all black and pearl and silver. Black as ink the trees stood out against the steel-blue of the sky; lines of marble balustrades and tall marble statues shimmered pearl-white against the dark background of the leaves; and here and there in marble basins stood fountains flinging up columns of chill silver into the air.

Rodrigo so stood that, without seeming to watch her, he could see Marotz, and her beauty struck him now even more than it had struck him in the ball-

room. It was a beauty that claimed attention, consideration—and here there was nothing to distract attention.

Rodrigo was thoroughly incapable of appreciating what he saw in her, but he was quite alive to it. That there was much more in Marotz than her great beauty he felt instinctively, though he was not the more drawn to her on that account. She was different from the other girls he had known, and the qualities, or characteristics, that constituted the difference did not increase her attraction for him. He did not care for too much character in a woman—or in any one.

Nevertheless, her peculiarities did not blind him to her charm, though for him the charm would have been more complete had there been no peculiarities at all. He thought he might do much worse than marry her; but he was not at all confident of his power to induce her to marry him.

He was quick and intuitive, and understood perfectly that there would be no possibility of becoming this girl's husband unless she herself chose that it should be so; there would be no easy-going arranging of the matter with her parents, who, he perceived, left her entirely mistress of herself.

Rodrigo was in many ways bad, but conceit is a failing not peculiarly distinctive of bad men; and he was singularly free from it. He was able to be aware that his name was illustrious, his fortune large, and himself as attractive as the majority of his fellows, without this making him at all sure of an easy conquest.

His aunt frequently assured him that he was extremely handsome, and he merely remarked that

she exaggerated. She also declared that he was very clever, and he only wondered if she were a judge.

He was far from feeling confident that either his wits or his beauty would suffice to make Marotz willing to be his wife. As for his money and his rank, he did not count them as factors in the calculation, not because he undervalued either, but because he so far understood her. He dismissed the question of his wealth and noble name as having a merely negative bearing on the matter; no objections could be made against him on either count.

It may seem odd that such a man should have even wanted to have such a girl for his wife; and odd it was, no doubt. Life is the oddest thing we know, with all its weirdly-woven desires and purposes. A hundred girls, without the peculiarities that he saw and disliked in Marotz, would willingly have married him had he asked them.

But a hundred girls so magnificently beautiful as Marotz could not easily have been found, and he desired that her beauty should belong to himself.

Nor, if he did marry her, would he be faithful to her. Such an idea never occurred to him. She, of course, would be faithful to him; for she would be his wife, his Duchess, his children's mother; but he would be only her husband. He did not propose to be her lover.

"Are you cold?" he asked her, leaning towards her, and speaking in a clear but low tone.

His accent, like that of many Neapolitans, was, he knew, disagreeable when he spoke loudly and fast.

No Italians are better company than the Neapoli-

tans, none are so amusing, but their intonation is often thoroughly unpleasant.

"Cold! No; are you?"

"I wish I was!—my heart at least."

She was annoyed. Her thoughts were out in the mysterious garden; for it seemed to her mysterious. She had never seen it by day, and knew nothing of what its wide spaces of black shadow might contain; she would never set foot in it, though it lay so close beneath her feet. It was like a garden in a picture, of which a glimpse is given through a window.

"So you are regretting that you have not a cold heart," she said, annoyed at being forced to this silly talking. "Perhaps it is colder than you say."

He glanced keenly at her. He knew all about himself, for self-knowledge is not the monopoly of the good, and was well aware that in truth he had not what is called a warm heart.

"Oh, it is not cold at all! It is on fire! It has burned my shirt—can't you see?—like San Filippo's."

"The fire in San Filippo's heart was the love of God," she said quietly, her eyes by no means turned to her companion's shirt, but looking far away into the folded shadows of the trees.

"And the fire in mine," he almost whispered, so low that she need not seem to have heard, so low that one could hardly tell if he spoke to himself only, "is the love of God's most perfect creature."

She said nothing at all, nor gave any sign that she had heard.

It was the first time any one had tried to "make love" to her. It was not a very considerable attempt, as she perceived, but it was a *ballon-d'essai*, though a

little one, and she knew that it was so. Probably Rodrigo did not expect much response, or any immediate response at all. Of that also she was conscious. And he met with none.

This was not because he was himself disagreeable to her, for he was not. She knew nothing against him, and had found him not uninteresting. This was his first attempt to talk to her in this way; hitherto he had instinctively chosen topics that had pleased her, and he was a good talker, who knew how to make his subject serve his turn.

He was clever in many ways, and was clever enough not to be solicitous about showing off his cleverness. Moreover, he possessed a strong attractive force, and Marotz was drawn by it.

She did not now answer what he had said, nor did she keep quite silent, which would itself have been an answer, or left him free to fashion his own answer out of her silence. She said something almost immediately, which in his turn he must reply to; and he felt that she had made it impossible for him to continue in the strain she had interrupted.

Yet there had been no sign of displeasure against him, and she had intended none. So that he was by no means dissatisfied. He understood her very well, as he understood most people, and he told himself that she wanted to consider what he had tried to do, and would do so if he gave her opportunity.

He wished her to know that he desired, when he could, to propose to her, but he was quite content with that for the present. She was unlike other girls, and he did not suppose that he could make love to her as he might have done to any one else. He

perceived that he did not repel her, as he knew she would be repelled could she guess what sort of man he had been, and was.

Presently he became silent, and allowed her also to fall into silence, so that she might think.

Love, she knew, had been offered to her, and she wondered if she knew what love is. Was love the keynote of all this subtle, whispering music which bade the feet dance, music that seemed like the voice of flowers, the caress of odoured zephyrs, the rhythms of hidden waters, the smell of spring? Was love, in fact, life, and in offering love to her did he bid her come and live?

She thought it seemed as if in his beautiful hand he held a chalice to her lips, and that which filled it to the bubbling brim was life. She divined its sharp sweet taste, its warm stimulus; once let her bend her lips to it and drink, and through her veins would flow swiftly to her heart a river of intoxicating movement, liquid light, almost of fire.

For seventeen years she had existed, far away in folded valleys among stooping mountains; now he called to her to begin to live.

That he had lived much himself her instinct told her truly; but instinct is not always explicit, and it failed to tell her of what coloured threads his life had been woven.

He had lived, and asked now to be her teacher; nay, he offered life to her rather as a gift than a lesson. Of this she thought more than of that other offering of love, or rather she had passed on from the idea of love in itself to the larger thought of love as life itself.

Certainly she did not herself love Rodrigo di Toledo as yet, but she did not even ask herself if she loved him. She was not thinking of him personally, but only of him as the high priest of life, who had beckoned her into the temple.

CHAPTER XIV

A LITTLE later Marotz danced again with Don Fabio Maiori, who had been her first partner that night. It was after supper and, as it happened her last dance, though not the last on the programme. She was by no means tired, but Don Fabio thought she was, for he found her more silent; and the odd expression he had noticed at first was changed for one quite different.

He had not understood that look of hers, and had wondered what it meant. There had been a shining exultation in her eyes, and a brilliance almost like excitement; but now it seemed like preoccupation, though she looked less calm.

"If you are tired," he said, "shall we rest? *Every* one is dancing this dance, and it is rather crowded."

"No, I am not tired; but it is, as you say, rather a crowd, and for the first time to-night I feel hot."

As he led her out of the dance they passed close to the band, and the Imperial and Royal Court Bandmaster lifted his black head from his violin and looked at her. His eyes met those of Marotz, and he bent down again; above all the other instruments she could hear his, and it suddenly made her think of the mocking laugh of a plover, or a sea-gull, as he falls aslant down the wind. Don Fabio led

her to another balcony, looking also into the garden of the palace, but into quite a different part of it.

"Another reason I was ready to agree to your suggestion," she said, "and stop dancing, was that I did not like the music of that dance."

"It is said to be his finest waltz."

"I dare say. Very likely it is fine. But it seemed to me ghastly."

"It is odd you should say that. Did you know there was any story about that particular waltz?"

"No. What is it?"

"He did not compose the air; he founded it on a very old Czech one, concerning which there is a tradition. A certain wizard ages ago had a lover, and she died. Wizards are not necessarily ugly and old and forbidding-looking, you know, and this one was a very beautiful young man but: he was terribly potent, and it is not necessary to inquire whence his power was derived. The maiden whom he loved loved him; but they told her she could not marry him, for he was unbaptised and a friend of the Powers of Night. How could she marry a man who had not been baptised—it would be no sacrament? So she obeyed, but she would not marry the other lover of whom they all approved, and buried herself in the cloister. Her wizard knew not where she was hidden, but with his pipe he played without the high wall of convent after convent, and at last he found the right one. On one side of the convent garden ran a river, and beyond this stood the wizard in the moonlight, playing his dreadful music, which no one could hear but those whom he chose to hear it. Through her sleep the nun whom he loved heard it,

and at its summons she came to him, out into the warm night, down through the pale garden where the flowers nodded in their slumber, across the river, stepping from one broad water-lily leaf to another till she stood beside him on the grassy bank. Then she awoke—and, seeing where she was and who had called her out of her enclosure, she sank down dead at his feet.”

Marotz shivered, but Don Fabio did not see her shudder.

“Is that the end of it?” she asked.

“No. A spying old nun had seen her go, and they sent after her; but when they found she was dead, they would not have her brought back to be buried in their own grave-yard, but had her buried there and then without dirge in a disused church-yard hard by, that had been forsaken because a witch haunted it who had died pretending penitence and been allowed Christian burial there. The wizard watched the old dwarf sexton dig the grave, under a shaking aspen-tree, and watched while he and his five sons laid the dishonoured nun in it. Then when they were gone he drew out his pipe and played again, and all the dead awoke and heard him calling; one by one they obeyed his magic music, and hurried to him, and his own dead lover with them; and there they danced together till the grey fingers of the dawn began to draw aside the curtain of the night; and the tune he played is that on which Strauss founded that waltz, that, they say, would compel the dead to come and dance.”

They could hear it plainly still, though muffled

by distance; and outside in the garden lay the weird moonlight.

Presently another music came from the garden to meet it, the thin voices of nuns that wailed the *Miserere*. In a corner of the great garden stood a building, all dark except for the narrow windows of what must be a chapel, for they were tall and lancet-shaped, and it was from them that the cold music of repentance came.

Marotz turned towards the sound, and the young man at her side said—

"They are the Sisters of the Reparation."

"*The* Reparation. I don't think I ever heard of them. What Order is it?"

"They are not an Order. There is only this one convent of these nuns, and they are only what is called a Congregation."

"Are they a Community of Reparation to the Blessed Sacrament?"

"No. A certain member of this Imperial House," and as he spoke Don Fabio lowered his voice as out of deference to those whose guests they were, "committed a great crime, and this Convent of Reparation was founded on the spot where the crime took place. The nuns are all somehow or other connected with the Imperial family, some by very distant cousinship, or intermarriage, some by quite near relationship; but they are very few."

"The convent seems to be *in* the garden?"

"Well, a high wall shuts it off, but that you can hardly see, for it lies mostly in the shadow of those trees."

From behind them came the last wild phrases of

the music that was said to be able to call the dead to come and dance; from the mournful shadows of the garden came the sad singing of the nuns.

"They are like water and wine," said Fabio, listening to the two.

"There is more water in the world than wine," she answered.

"And most of it is bitter."

CHAPTER XV

On the day following Marotz went to the chapel of the Reparation Convent, which has an entrance from a quiet street, or rather *cul-de-sac*, and is open all day for those who care to go and pray there.

The part of the chapel thus accessible is not, of course, in the enclosure, nor is it ever entered by the nuns.

It is not large, but very sumptuous, having been enriched with successive gifts by various members of the Imperial family, specially no doubt by those whose daughters or sisters had joined the Community.

There are three altars, the high altar standing on the spot where the crime had been perpetrated for which the Community made perpetual reparation.

The church is nearly circular, and on the right as one faces the high altar is another dedicated to St. Dismas, the Good Thief; that on the left is to St. Francis, the Poor Man of Assisi, with a peculiar picture representing the great penitent blind, as he is said to have made himself by weeping.

There was only one other person present when Marotz went in, a young man, who seemed very devout, and prayed with entire abstraction. After a while he finished his prayers and went away.

On each side of the central altar were gilded *grilles*, through which one caught a glimpse of the nuns'

choir within. It seemed rigorously plain, no sign of any ornament or decoration could be seen, only stalls of uncarved wood. The inner altar, back to back with that in the outer chapel, was, of course, invisible.

Presently an old man came in, and went towards a door on the left, leading to the priest's sacristy, through which he disappeared. After a few minutes he came out again, and began to occupy himself about the altars. No doubt he was the sacristan. He wore list shoes and moved about without any sound. He glanced occasionally at Marotz, and wanted to open up a little conversation with her, but for some time had no opportunity.

Presently he kicked over a small bell, and at the sound Marotz looked up.

"I am sorry, Gnädiges Fräulein, if I disturbed you," he said politely, coming close to her. "That," he continued, "is where the sisters receive Holy Communion."

He pointed towards a dark arched doorway a little to the right of one of the two gilded *grilles*. He told her that within it was another *grille*, which he begged her to come and see.

"The priest," he explained, "comes here with the Blessed Sacrament; the nuns have a *prie-dieu* on the other side of the *grille*, which has a little opening at the height of their heads as they kneel. But their *prie-dieu* is in another recess, curtained, and nearly dark like this one. So the priest only sees just the mouth of each nun as she comes to Holy Communion. Her veil comes down nearly to her mouth. Then she rises up and goes away, and

another kneels at the *prie-dieu* to receive Our Lord."

"So the priest never enters the nuns' chapel, even to say Mass. It is in the enclosure, I suppose."

"Yes. They can see nothing of the Mass, but they can hear. And the Tabernacle is double, with a door on their side, which Poor Sister may open so that the Monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament is exposed. There is a glass screen at the back of the Tabernacle—as *we* look at it, from here—so that though the nuns can see the Monstrance they cannot, of course, touch it."

On the other side, to the left of the second gilded *grille*, he showed her a somewhat similar recess to that used for giving Holy Communion to the nuns.

"That is where the priest hears their confessions," he explained. "Look!" he added quickly, with a sort of proud excitement, "there is one of the sisters."

He pointed through the gilded grating, and Marotz saw through it a veiled figure. The dress was rather ugly, a habit of dingy brown, and a very long veil, reaching nearly to the level of the knees behind as in front, of equally dingy black, no white visible anywhere.

Marotz turned and moved away. It seemed a sort of intrusion to watch the nun, who indeed passed out of sight immediately, for she had come to kneel before the inner altar, perhaps at some *prie-dieu* invisible from the outer chapel.

The old man insisted on showing Marotz his own peculiar domain, the sacristy, where he had many fine things to display: jewelled chalices, rich vest-

ments, splendid thuribles, and candlesticks of exquisite workmanship.

"But the nuns see none of it!" he cried triumphantly in his thin voice. "Even in chapel it is all mortification for them."

"And now, Gnädiges Fräulein, come here, please, and look at this door."

He led her to a richly-decorated arch, within which was set an obdurate-looking, spiked door of heavy oak.

"It leads," said he, "into the enclosure. Through it the priest enters when a nun is dying to carry to her the Viaticum. . . ."

It was evidently his climax.

"Only then!" he concluded, with his odd, proprietary pride in the austerities of the Community whose servant he was.

Marotz looked obediently at the door, and read the inscription carved in the stone above it—

"MAGISTER ADEST ET VOCAT TE"

"'The Master is here, and calleth thee,'" she translated for herself.

CHAPTER XVI

"But," asked Hals, "if you think it the highest calling any one can have, why should you mind?"

"If I were sure it was a calling. If I could feel sure she was called," said Lucia.

"No one can be sure in such a matter as to another person, even though she be one's own child."

"I know," Lucia agreed gently. "Perhaps no one can feel *sure* even concerning herself."

"Exactly. But Marotz believes she is sure."

His wife sighed. It was absolutely true that she regarded vocation to the Religious Life as the highest calling that a woman could have. But did she believe that Marotz had received that lofty summons? Nay, she asked herself, did she wish to believe it?

To die for his country may be the noblest thing a man can do, but does the mother of an only son desire this glorious thing for him? May it not seem too glorious?

Lucia was so honest that she could not assure herself that if her only remaining child was, in fact, called to Holy Religion, she would be glad that it was so.

Hals knew all this, because he knew everything that moved her. Their long courtship, begun on their marriage-day, was not over. His sympathy was so deep that it made him, a man not naturally

unselfish, utterly unselfish in his relations with her.

The result now was that he was so much grieved for her sorrow that he scarcely seemed to be sorry on his own account. And yet it would have been natural that for Marotz to become a nun should trouble him more than his wife.

"Che sarà sarà!" he said.

"Yes. May it be whatever is best."

"How can we tell what will be best?"

"Whatever God wills is what is best."

"What He wills *must* happen," said Hals.

In practice this did not seem to Lucia to be the case, and yet how could she challenge his assertion, which she felt had a note of interrogation in it too?

She sighed again, and let her thoughts rest in the concrete uncertainty about Marotz, instead of being tempted away into the abstract uncertainties where Hals loved to pluck at truths, or the seeds of truths. Perhaps he specially wished to reverse this process, and draw her mind away in some measure from the personal, which was just now shadowed, into impersonal regions where the shadows themselves hinted at the forms of the truths that cast them.

"Lucia," he said, "what God wills must happen, for He is Omnipotent."

"All the same there are rebels even against omnipotence, and in every rebellion there is evil done and suffering caused."

"We say so. But no one could rebel against omnipotence unless He chose."

"Hals, do you doubt—can *we* doubt—that there is evil and suffering?"

The terrible look was in her eyes that he had noticed years ago, before their marriage, in her mother's, and both mother and daughter owed it to a son.

"Beloved, I know there are the things we call by those names, just as there are the things we call bliss and happiness and pleasure. But they are not proven, as in my mother's country they say of certain accusations."

He paused, and then added—

"The existence of good, we know that. For we know that God is. The existence of evil we have never proven. Inconvenience we experience, and suffering we learn, but these also can be stages or phases of good, for good is infinite, like God, whose attribute it is, and we cannot measure or comprehend it. We only recognise it in certain dresses."

"Sin cannot be good at all events."

"If it be absolutely evil, how does God permit it?"

"Hals, the Church tells us plainly that sin is intrinsically bad."

"The Church tells us so many things."

"But they are all true."

"Yes; and many things besides. We do not always understand what the Church says."

Sometimes Hals annoyed her, as we often are annoyed by those whom we love best. At present he would rather his wife should be irritated by his tiresome sayings than troubled by her thoughts concerning their greatest mutual possession—Marotz.

"Sometimes," Lucia declared, "I wonder if you believe anything."

"Anything! Why, I believe much more than you;

I believe everything, like charity, who believeth all things, and hopeth all things."

They both fell silent. Then after a time Lucia spoke again.

"Hals, it is not out of selfishness I am sorrowful."

"Beloved, do I not know that?"

He lifted her beautiful hand and laid his lips upon it with all his lover's tenderness.

"If I could think this would make her happy!" she murmured.

"Dearest, we know scarcely anything of happiness; how can we tell when any one else is happy, we who scarcely can tell when we are happy ourselves?—much less can we guess what will *make* ourselves or another person happy."

"I guessed you would make me happy."

"And I knew that you would make me; but has not much of our happiness been the sharing of pain with one another?"

This was a hard saying, and yet she could barely controvert it.

"Listen, my beloved," he went on; "we cannot, you and I, kick against the pricks; they are sharp, but we need not let them wound us more by kicking at them. We have given Marotz *free-will*, as God gave it to us all, and if she so uses it that we shrink in pain, still I think we must not show it. *Noblesse oblige*."

She knew this was true, and felt it as fully as did he. Had it not been so he would not have said it.

"Marotz will certainly go to this convent," he went on; "and she will burn her boats."

"You mean, to prevent herself from coming back?" cried Lucia, with a new sadness.

"Oh, no! She would not think of that. The invader who burns his boats is a little doubtful of his men, or a little afraid lest they should doubt him. Marotz will burn hers merely because it will not strike her that they can be of any more use."

Lucia sighed again.

"She would never be too proud to turn back if she found she had taken the wrong road," Hals told his wife. "*Her* pride is like other people's humility."

"Hals," asked Lucia, "if she goes, may we wish her to come back?"

"Of course, if it is not what is meant for her."

"But in that case what misfortune she should go at all."

"Why?"

"If a girl is not destined to be a nun it is always better for her not to try."

"Lucia, it is not thus at all. You talk as though were Marotz to go and then come back it would be a failure. It is not a question of trying to be a nun and not succeeding; it is merely going to see whether the life of what is called 'Religion' is suitable to her or not."

"But, Hals, have you not noticed that girls who have once been in a convent—as postulants, I mean—are never much good out of it? The cloister life, even when they do not stick to it, puts them out of conceit with the world."

"The '*world*'!" remonstrated Hals vehemently. "You talk as if you and I, and all who are not of

Holy Religion, belonged to what Don Ercole calls the *Massa Damnata*."

He looked so cross that Lucia laughed, which was probably what he intended.

"You and I," he declared, "belong to Holy Religion just as much as any monks or nuns. If there is meant to be religion it can hardly be meant to be so restricted in quantity."

Lucia did not dare to say that he always took it for granted that whatever was "meant" actually took place; she knew that objection to his argument would land her in difficulties, as it had done already. So, being a Southern woman, she took refuge in a proverb.

"Cream is better than milk," she observed, "and it lies at the top, but there is never so much of it."

"Because the milk is more useful," retorted her husband.

He liked the text she had so rashly provided him, and went on with it complacently.

"Cream is a luxury, like Holy Religion; milk is a necessity, like married life, and ordinary business and industry. Of course the cream sits on the top and thinks itself finer, but we can all do without it. No, God knows what He is about, and gives us most of what is really necessary, and only a little of what we could do without altogether."

And yet, though he talked thus, he could seem far more cheerful than Lucia at the prospect of their only child abandoning ordinary life for that pale reduction of life, as it seemed to him, that is called the cloister.

He certainly did not love Marotz less; when there

had been two children Lucia seemed at least to have that special tenderness for her son that one sees so often, whereas the youth could never have been to Hals all that Marotz was, even if he had not come to such utter disgrace and misery. And now that Marotz was the only one it seemed, even to herself, that her father saw in her not only herself but himself and her mother; and in her met all the love a man can have, not only for his child, but for his child's mother and for himself. Hals loved Lucia in herself, but he loved himself in Marotz only.

In the unnumbered intimacies of daily life Hals would miss their child, when she had left them for the cold distance of the cloister, more than would Lucia. And in the meantime he foresaw this more acutely, for he had a livelier imagination. But he was less affected than his wife by other aspects of the matter.

"Hals," she said, "if Marotz goes I can never lie down to sleep in my comfortable bed without a pang—to think of her watching in the chilly chapel, or coming back from her vigil to try and sleep on her hard board. I shall feel greedy every time a meal comes, and I remember Marotz and her wooden bowl of nasty, greasy, vegetable soup, and all the other disagreeable things she will have to live upon."

He winced a little at the thought of the cold, for he knew that Marotz detested cold, but the idea of the rough and, no doubt, unappetising food did not affect him much.

"Non in solo pane vivit homo," he quoted. He knew that for mere physical hardships, hardships though they might really be, Marotz would not

care much. The life, he had always perceived, was for her more than the meat; the body more than the raiment. What he dreaded was the starvation of the life itself. Wealth and its comforts were to Marotz, he believed, no more than habits; her necessities lay deeper than pleasant food and soft bedding.

But to Lucia's nature these material hardships seemed more cruel, and Hals felt that his own trouble would be deepened by the knowledge that his wife was suffering from the maternal softness of her heart, shocked at the idea of her child's austerities.

The mystic is generally inclined to over-estimate the significance of mortification as of indulgence. He gives more credit to untasted indulgences than they deserve, and more credence to the effect of physical mortification than is justified either, and he exaggerates the importance of both. Hals was not a mystic, and neither thought the seductions of "sensible delights" so very fascinating, nor their mortification so very glorious. To a mind like his it appeared that too much was made of these things. He thought he could readily have engaged to live entirely on potatoes or green-stuff—if there had been any object in it—but no human eloquence would have induced him to surrender to any one the control of his will, and of his time, of his movements, and of his conduct.

Was Marotz mistaken in thinking that she could? That was what troubled her father; not the picture of her discomfortable hair-shirt, her straw sandals and bed of board, her greasy, slushy soup, with its nasty little globules of yellow, melted fat, its bob-

bing onions and submerged lumps of cabbage. All this, he knew, would be neither here nor there if Marotz could abdicate herself, and lay aside all the passionate, emulous, tender Marotz that he knew, to become some Sister Ignota that he tried in vain to divine.

CHAPTER XVII

FAR away in the twisted valley, among wild Sicilian mountains, the news that Marotz was, perhaps, to return no more to San Vito fell on her grandparents like a thunder-clap.

The Duchessa read Lucia's letter almost with dismay, and her courage chilled within her as she thought she would have to tell her husband. But that task, at all events, they had determined to spare her, and at the same moment, in another part of the castle, San Vito was reading the same news in a letter from Hals.

At first he was simply angry, and his anger was very hot.

"Onofria, have you heard this?" he asked, flinging into her room with quick, impatient step. But his wife's face told him at once that she had heard. She seemed almost dazed, and as yet quite incapable of disentangling her emotions.

"They must be both mad," declared San Vito; "one always knew *he* was: but—Onofria, it is infamous!"

Poor Onofria wept. To do her justice her tears were infrequent, and she scarcely ever cried before her husband. On the whole she might have done worse, for San Vito was a kind, hot-hearted rather than hot-headed man, and was fond of his wife.

"No one seems to have said a word to prevent her," he continued, his anger evidently all against their children; and Onofria was consoled to find herself not included in his denunciations. But she knew all three of them perhaps better than he did, and did not feel at all certain that, if Marotz had made up her mind, any words they could have said would have prevented her.

"It means the end of our family," said her husband; and perhaps never until then had she fully realised how much he thought of his family.

"For three generations," he went on, "we have suffered from the bad conduct of men representing it: and now it is to be brought to an end by the last woman representing it." Onofria sat and wept, and thought of the three sons of the house of whose evil behaviour he spoke thus bitterly. First there had been his brother, then their son, then Lucia's: on whose account they lived, as they had done for so many years, in their gaunt castle among the mountains, instead of in the palaces at Palermo or Catania, as did other nobles.

"In this at least there is no disgrace," she whispered.

"Disgrace, no! Only folly." He almost shouted. "We're pretty well used to being disgraced," he added bitterly, "and might have learned by now how to bear it. But foolishness is something new."

"But, Mariano, if it is God's will!" she pleaded.

"God's will! A green girl's will!" San Vito cried scornfully.

Onofria shuddered and would have crossed herself had she dared.

Then Zia came in, and they told her. The Countess

of Belgiojosa was still alive, and did not look much different; at fifty or sixty she had been an old, sapless, dingy-looking woman, and at seventy-five or eighty she hardly seemed much older.

"*Per carità!*" she exclaimed. "Lucia and her husband were not to be trusted with her. They had always maggots."

"*Certo!* That is what I say," agreed her nephew, who had never before thought her so sensible.

"The Cardinal will be glad," declared Zia; a remark which immediately robbed the old woman of San Vito's newly awakened approval.

San Vito had two first cousins, not brothers, but first cousins to one another; and they were his only male relations. Zia was already thinking of the wide estates of the San Vito.

"The Cardinal will be able to cut a fine figure in Rome," she added, wagging her head grimly. "And there is Padre Antonino; they will make him General of his Order,"

"That is nonsense, Zia; the Cardinal is not ten years younger than I am, and the Frate is about the same age," said San Vito crossly. "Why should not Marotz outlive them just the same?"

Zia stared.

"But if she is a nun she can't hold all the estates," she objected; "that is never the custom."

"No one else shall hold them, when Onofria and I are dead, till she is dead too," declared San Vito angrily.

"Perhaps," suggested Onofria, "she may not succeed." It was meekly intended for consolation; but the phrase annoyed her husband.

"Succeed indeed! A fine success!" he snapped out.

"It is a pity she went away," said the old Countess. "Don Ercole would never have tried to make Marotz become a nun. He understands what is due to the Casa San Vito."

Poor Onofria was miserable: she was broken-hearted at her grandchild's determination to enter Holy Religion, and unspeakably grieved for her husband's sake, and for that of the girl's parents; but the hard, worldly way in which San Vito and his aunt looked at the matter shocked her.

She thought it rather hard that Divine Providence had allowed a vocation to carry off their one ewe-lamb: but many hard dispensations had been permitted by the same high authority in respect of the Casa San Vito, and she could not feel this last misfortune to be so dreadful as the others, nor did she dare to arraign heavenly decrees, lest a worse thing should come to them. Nevertheless she had insight enough to feel that because it *was* the last it was in some sort the least bearable, as the last straw is more impossible to bear than its predecessors, albeit they may severally have been more grievous. And she realised her husband's feeling that, whereas the three misfortunes they had endured, in the bad conduct of his brother and son and grandson, had hit at the honour of the family, this act of his granddaughter's would destroy its existence.

She could not help thinking it was a pity that God had so many things to attend to, especially now, when it appeared that this world was only one of millions, perhaps all requiring a good deal

of attention; and she had long deplored the levelling spirit of the times, and now it really seemed as if the liberalism of the world had mounted higher, to more celestial regions. Why could not this vocation of Marotz's have been sent to one of the doctor's plain daughters? He had often bewailed their disinclination for Holy Religion.

"How can I give them all dowries, Signora Duchessa?" he had asked; "there are five of them, and no one will marry them without. My wife makes two *novenas* every month—one to San Giuseppe to send them husbands, and one to Santa Rosalia to send them vocations. But they refuse to be nuns—even Giuseppina, who is as ugly as St. Peter's mother-in-law—and no one comes to me to ask for even one of them, to inquire about even Lucetta, who is tolerable, except for her teeth."

It seemed all the harder to the poor Duchessa when she remembered that it is the soul God cares about; the beauty of the body, as is well known, being a matter of no consideration whatever. Marotz would be at no advantage as a nun on account of her singular and splendid beauty, nor would it have been any drawback to Don Antonio's daughters in the cloister even had they been much plainer than they were.

The Duchessa was very miserable in those days. San Vito was angry with Hals and Lucia, and, in their absence, snubbed his wife. She had never found Zia at all *simpatica*, and did not now think it worth while to go to her for comfort. Besides, the old woman had grown very deaf, and Onofria did not feel that it would soothe her to bellow her troubles into Zia's yellow ear.

She made one abortive attempt at finding consolation, at the convent, but did not care to repeat it, so little had it seemed a success.

The Prioress had been delighted at her coming, for she longed to hear all about Marotz at first hand.

"Has there been any disappointment or anything?" she inquired ingenuously, as if frankly puzzled by this sudden determination on the part of the young heiress.

"Of course not!" declared the Duchessa, much annoyed. She considered the Prioress's hint a great impertinence. Young ladies in the position of her granddaughter are not much liable to such disappointments as the fat nun insinuated.

The Mother Prioress was of an abundant, lumpy figure, and had a complexion derived, like her figure, chiefly from macaroni; on each side of her nose she had a large wart, though that on the spectator's left was much higher up than that on his right. No one could possibly have imagined her as anything but a nun, and no one could have satisfactorily told himself why she was a nun. It was impossible to Onofria to conceive of the soul in that flaccid body, and yet to such supposititious soul the dead-weight incubus, body, was theoretically sacrificed.

She sat and watched the Duchessa out of her little pig-eyes with a flabby inquisitiveness.

"This news—you are annoyed at it?" she observed.

"She is all we have left."

The Mother Prioress heaved a spacious sigh which lifted her wimple about seven inches into the air. She knew all about the Duchessa's dead son, and her dead grandson, and all about the Duke's dead

brother too. She sighed professionally, for those three young men had been out-and-out sinners, for whom it was, so to speak, her occupation to pray—to that effect there was, indeed, almost a contract between the Casa San Vito and the convent. The intercession of the neighbouring nuns had been pre-empted by benefactions repeated from generation to generation.

"It is, perhaps, the Will of God," said the Prioress, who had long been accustomed so to describe everything unpleasantly inevitable.

"Oh! no doubt," agreed Onofria dismally; as who should say, "That's the worst of it."

"We will pray for you," observed the Prioress; but this also failed to comfort the Duchessa, seeing that God was, naturally, on the other side. She hinted as much, whereupon the nun, who was not a theologian, observed that He might change His mind.

"Besides," she added, "we will ask St. Joseph." As St. Joseph was notoriously disposed to provide unmarried ladies with husbands, it was natural to conclude that he might not be averse to interfering with a threatened vocation.

"You might make a *novena* to him too," suggested the Prioress, "and give him a candle every day till it is finished. What Order is this she wants to join? Did you ever hear of it?"

Onofria admitted she had not, and had nothing to urge in its defence when the Prioress declared it must be some modern Congregation.

"Of course any bishop can dispense from such vows as theirs," she asserted. "They have no Solemn

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Vows, you know. Only the Pope could dispense one of us."

None of this helped Onofria. If Marotz became a nun it would certainly not be to get dispensed from her vows with the least possible difficulty. On the other hand, if the last hope of the San Vito were destined to disappear into the cloister, it seemed a pity that she should have chosen some unheard-of new Congregation that was evidently not a proper Order at all.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE last of poor Onofria's candles to St. Joseph had scarcely burned itself out before Marotz entered the Convent of the Reparation as a postulant.

She was not, of course, clothed in the habit at her entrance, but over one of her own ordinary gowns, the plainest and simplest she had, wore a thin but ample cloak, which buttoned at the neck, and almost entirely concealed it. It was made of an ugly and rather dismal woollen stuff of the colour of ashes, and had a large hood something like that worn by the Little Sisters of the Poor when out of doors. This entirely hid her hair and almost concealed her face, so that even now she looked like some sort of nun.

She was not expected to keep the Holy Rule, but to learn it, and to follow the exercises of the Community partly as a spectator. Some manual labour she was given, but it was not difficult, nor did she find it in the least disagreeable. To wash plates and dishes, and sweep cloisters, was at first almost amusing, and was only too easy to be interesting. Of course, there was also her own bed to make, for she was not as yet allowed to sleep upon the inclined board with its thin straw-mat and dark-brown rugs, which was all the bed of the professed sisters.

Little by little she was allowed to follow more

and more closely the exercises of the Community, till her complete day was something as follows:

At quarter to four a sister knocked at the door of her cell and said "Benedicamus Domino," where-to Marotz, rising instantly from bed, responded, "Deo Gratias." Turning in the direction of the chapel she then genuflected to the Blessed Sacrament and saluted It, saying, "Divine Sentinel of the World, that hast watched whilst we have slept, give us now grace to share Thy watch."

Again turning she genuflected towards the four points of the compass, that is, in every direction, because all over the earth the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, greeting Our Lord with the four following salutations:

"East and West, North and South, Thou art, who art everywhere.

"Lodestar of the Souls of Men, draw my soul to Thine.

"Sun of our day, warm my heart with the rays of Thine.

"Thou that givest me to-day, make it Thine own. When Life's day sets may my day dawn to Thee."

Then came the morning salutation of God's Great Mother, thus:

"God greet thee, Mary, God greet Thee! Thirty-three thousand times I greet Thee! As He greeted Thee that was born of Thee, and thirty-three years shared His exile with Thee. Mary, God greet Thee. In the Name of the Father whose Eldest Daughter thou art: in the Name of the Son whose Mother thou art: in the Name of the Holy Ghost whose Spouse thou art: in the Name of the Blessed Trinity whose

Mirror thou art. As He in His heart may I in my heart greet thee, Our Lady!"

This would leave about ten minutes or less for such dressing and washing as was necessary, and then a bell rang, and at four o'clock the small Community was gathered in the bare chapel.

A nun read Morning Prayers, then the points of meditation were given out, and for an hour the sisters meditated. At first all knelt, but, if "distraction" assailed any, she would rise and seat herself, kneeling again after a few minutes. Those who knelt remained bolt upright, not leaning upon or against the desk of the stall in front of them.

Though "points" of meditation were given out no nun need adhere to these, but was free to adapt her meditation to any subject she herself preferred. At five o'clock Mass was said by the priest at the invisible altar in the outer church. Those who went to Holy Communion then made their thanksgiving, the rest usually reading meanwhile, but at this time not a saint's life, but some mystical work such as *The Following of Christ* or St. Theresa's famous *Castle of the Soul*.

At six Prime was sung, then the little Community separated, and each nun went to her own cell, which she put in order, and occupied herself as she chose till seven o'clock, when the bell summoned all to the refectory for breakfast, which consisted of coffee and a small roll or *brioche* of plain but slightly sweetened bread. This lasted about ten minutes, and during it silence was maintained; until half-past seven, if it were fine, all the nuns walked up and down their narrow, high-walled garden, but singly and not talking

to one another. If it were wet they walked in the cloisters in the same way, all moving in the same direction, and never turning back, but continuing the circuit of the cloisters which surrounded the inner court. In the centre of this green court was a large Calvary, around which were the graves of such of the Community as had already died.

From half-past seven until nine the sisters "studied" in their own cells or in the small library of the convent; these studies were all in the mystical life, and one or two of the nuns were writing books connected with such subjects, or lives of saints. At nine o'clock the bell again called them all to the chapel, where Tierce was sung; after which they immediately adjourned to the chapter room, where chapter of faults was held. At this each nun accused herself of her faults against the Holy Rule during the past twenty-four hours, and performed the penance accorded to her.

This lasted until nearly ten, when they all returned to the chapel, the few intervening minutes being spent walking up and down in the garden, or around the cloister as before.

From ten till eleven was passed silently in chapel, where the second Meditation was made, for which no "points" were read out. At eleven o'clock the Way of the Cross was made, the "stations" for which were set up on the walls of the cloister: this devotion, however, would not be made in Paschal time. It would leave about half-an-hour free before twelve o'clock, and this time was devoted to manual labour. The manual labour in question was of various kinds—work in the garden, scrubbing the

cloisters or galleries of the convent, cleaning windows, polishing the uncarpeted but varnished floors of cells, library, community room, nuns' choir, and refectory, of washing altar linen, ironing and starching it, mending vestments, and making or mending of their own habits, and washing their own underclothing, which was all of wool, as no linen was allowed by the Holy Rule.

The cooking was not done by themselves, but by the Extern Sisters.

At noon the bell again called to chapel, where Sext was sung; after which the *silentium* was over and the nuns might speak to one another, which they did as they went to the refectory for dinner. During the meal, however, one of the Extern Sisters read aloud from a saint's life, which she usually did terribly badly, in a nasal sing-song voice, making unholy havoc of such proper names or polysyllabic words as might confront her. She attacked each of these as doggedly as if it had been a temptation, and routed it, knocking it past all recognition on occasion.

Dinner lasted about quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, and consisted of a vegetable soup, fish, a dish of fresh vegetables cooked with butter, and a dish of macaroni, rice, or sago, served with grated cheese and vinegar. On feast-days and Sundays there was a peculiar sticky cake of incalculable specific density. On Sundays, Thursdays, and all feasts not falling in their Lent there was also one sort of meat. But it must be explained that their Lent lasted from the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14, to Easter, and that by feasts they under-

stood only festivals of Our Lord or His Mother, the Apostles, or the patron saints of the country.

Immediately after dinner there was a brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and then recreation until three o'clock. This recreation was spent in the garden if it were fine, otherwise in the community room; during it the nuns conversed with one another, and, if it were indoors, made garments for the poor, or astounding artificial flowers which were ultimately arranged in bouquets and sent as presents to great ecclesiastics such as the Cardinal Archbishop, or to benefactors of the Congregation such as certain members of the Imperial Family.

During recreation, when it took place indoors, the conversation was always general, and was intended to promote "community feeling"; out of doors the nuns were allowed to walk in little groups of two and three, but this was considered less beneficial.

Recreation lasted till three o'clock, when Nones were sung, after which followed manual labour till four, then an hour's meditation, and at five Vespers and Compline together.

From half-past five until half-past six came an hour's study, and on Saturdays confessions were heard. From half-past six until seven o'clock there followed spiritual reading, each nun reading to herself out of her own book, but all sitting together in the chapel, or "in choir," as it was called.

At seven the Rosary was said, and after it followed a short "free time" until half-past seven, when the Community met again in refectory for supper, consisting of bread, milk, and a few dried or fresh

fruits. During this very brief repast the same book was read aloud as had been read at dinner.

At quarter to eight there was Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and at half-past eight the Community separated, the Great Silence began, and all the nuns went to "bed."

At midnight they were called to choir again for Matins and Lauds, followed by the Miserere and the De Profundis. It would generally be about quarter past one when these two penitential psalms were being sung, the hour at which the crime was committed for which the Reparation had been instituted.

After it the nuns would return in silence to their cells, to resume, if they could, their interrupted sleep.

CHAPTER XIX

THERE was no Prioress, no "Reverend Mother" even, in the Community. The foundress was still alive and still with them, but the title of Mother Foundress was never applied to her in her own presence, though several of the sisters would so speak of her to Marotz. Her only recognised appellation was that of Poor Sister; and she sat always in the lowest place, nearest to the door in refectory and at chapter, furthest from the altar in choir.

All the nuns were kind, but the Poor Sister was tender and affectionate.

Marotz could not help wondering if the others were going actually to like her, to be fond of her, at least till they learned whether or no she would stay. But their gentle foundress made the girl feel that she loved her already and unconditionally.

The other sisters were almost too eager to praise their institute, so eager that Marotz discounted their enthusiasm in spite of herself, and in spite of her recognition that it was entirely genuine and sincere.

The Poor Sister never praised her own work, nor seemed to wish that it should be praised. She hardly appeared even to desire to speak of it at all. Of herself she rarely did speak, and then only, as it

were, necessarily. But the nuns, when out of her hearing, talked of her incessantly.

Marotz very soon learned that they were ambitious, and their ambition was that their foundress should be canonised.

"But," laughed the postulant, "no one is canonised till they have been dead a long while; I don't want to think of her giving them the chance."

It was by no means forbidden to laugh in the Community of the Reparation; on the contrary, what first struck Marotz was the unaffected cheeriness of its spirit. Albeit an institute of penance, the sisters had all caught, though none perhaps to the same degree, the gentle and sweet air of happiness that distinguished its foundress.

Marotz was amused to note that whereas the nuns all spoke of "our order" when its inventor was not near enough to hear them, she herself, when forced to speak of it at all, would talk of "our little institute."

But in one thing foundress and sisters were alike. Marotz, of course, had known many nuns, and had met a good many monks especially such as had come to San Vito to preach "Missions." She had often perceived in these a disposition to brag, as it were, of the austerities of their Rule. The sisters of the Reparation seemed to have no realisation that they themselves practised any austerities at all. They were one and all most anxious that Marotz herself should not practise them, and seemed to think that unless she was eating all day long she must inevitably be ill or terribly hungry, and yet they never appeared to recollect that what might

be hard for her could possibly be difficult for themselves.

Twelve more unselfish women she had never met, and twelve happier women she could not believe that the world contained. There was no depression in the convent, no "vapours," no discontent; half the world's misery is due to hungry and underfed ambition, and the good nuns had no ambition except that their foundress might presently be canonised. Even that did not make them tiresome, though sometimes Marotz thought it did make them rather funny. They pined for miracles that might be ascribed to the heroic sanctity of their head, and watched for them almost unmercifully.

After all it was an amiable weakness.

The other half of human discomfort comes from wounded *amour propre*, and here was no *amour propre* to get itself hurt.

On all this Marotz pondered much, and was driven to the conclusion that all these women had a real "vocation."

Had she?

What was it? Could vocation be defined, could it be diagnosed? But diagnosis is the term we use for a doctor's recognition of the symptoms of disease, and the watchful postulant was certain that no disease was here. Vocation she perceived is rare, but not abnormal, not monstrous as every disease is monstrous, even the least uncommon.

Each of these women had a very easily recognisable individuality, not swamped, though merged, in the common vocation; they were not all of one pattern, or cut out of the same stuff. Nevertheless

something had fused them into a peculiar union, unison, almost unity. That something Marotz, with her swift power of correct intuition perceived to be the genuine, common vocation.

Had she got it?

That they were all keen, almost inquisitive, to watch if she had it, the postulant felt from the first moment she came among them. The Poor Sister alone betrayed neither anxiety nor curiosity to forestall herself in her conclusions. And yet it was the Poor Sister who first spoke directly to her about it. This curiosity, or at all events eagerness, underlay more than half that the others said to her; but they were too anxious to be easy, and never ventured to say out what they were saying covertly all the time.

"My dear child," said the Poor Sister, "do not talk much about your vocation, except to God. If it were advice possible to follow I would almost say do not think about it, even, very much. Do not at all events think about it anxiously."

"How do you mean, anxiously?"

"Well, I think I mean this: Do not be anxious to have a vocation. Be ready to do what God wants. It may be that you should not stay here."

They were walking in the narrow, high-walled garden.

"*'Magister adest et vocat te,'*" said Marotz, quoting the inscription over the door that led out of the "Extern" chapel into the clausura.

"I know," responded the foundress. "But He is everywhere. He calls all of us: but He is not here only, and it is not to this place that He calls all of us."

Marotz said nothing, and the old nun went on in her clear, gentle voice that made the girl think of a dove:

"This little house is a low porch of heaven to those whom God wills should wait here, till the golden gate opens, and we can pass out of this shadowy dawn into the full day."

"Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away," whispered Marotz.

"Yes, dear child—the shadows that the world's false light flings. . . . But, if any should come here, which we pray Him should not be, whom He has better uses for outside, these high walls would be a prison, and our cells horrible dens of captivity. Do not *want* to stay here, Marotz; only want to do what is right."

The old nun paused awhile and added softly:

"For some of us there are other reparations to be done outside; for some there are duties that cannot be abdicated."

"Are you thinking, dear Mother, of my father and mother?"

"No. If your vocation *is* here their parentage is superseded by God's own. Nor would God be stealing you from them. He never takes away; when He accepts He gives most fully. 'Not as the world gives give I to you.' But God's generosity is so divine that He lets us think *we* are giving to Him. Who is most her mother's, do you think, or her father's—the nun here, or the married daughter outside?"

Marotz understood. The quiet voice beside her did but half express, or hint, its meanings, leaving

wide spaces for her hearer's intelligence. But the listening postulant could bridge them.

For awhile they paced in communicative silence. Marotz did not care a bit that her companion should be canonised, but she felt that she was in truth a saint.

"'He who putteth his hand to the plough and looketh back,'" she quoted presently, "'is not worthy of Me.'"

The Poor Sister listened. To listen was her great gift, to listen with the heart, and not merely with the ears, and so to understand.

"The plough," she answered, "must be the work God puts into our hands to do. But he who finds that he has set his plough to the wrong field, and moves it away, is only brave, and is worthy of Him."

"Dear Mother, tell me, do you yourself think that this is God's field for me?"

"My little one,¹ no one can play Divine Providence for others. Good people sometimes try, and sometimes are obstinate, even when He Himself remonstrates. I cannot tell. Ask Him—ask Him only, and He will answer."

Then, as if she thought they were a little too solemn, she laughed quietly, and said:

"At chapter of faults to-morrow, you should confess to having twice broken our little Rule."

Marotz looked aghast. The "little Rule" had grown so important! But its originator took it quite lightly. Fifty years had not made her think her own regulations of divine obligation.

¹ They talked German, which was the "community" language.

"Don't look so startled! Only you have twice called me 'Mother,' and our little Rule bids you call me nothing but Poor Sister." And she herself laughed. "No," she begged, "don't mention it at chapter. After all it must seem hard at seventeen—are you seventeen yet?—to think of an old woman of seventy as one's sister."

CHAPTER XX

It was observed by the nuns that "our little postulant" (who was about a head taller than most of them) had a wonderful gift of prayer; and Marotz herself found that, breathing prayer as an atmosphere it became not merely easy, but inevitable, for her to breathe it out again. Her nature was mystical and everything here was calculated to develop the mystic element in her.

At first "the world" sank into perspective, even into the flatness of a picture that is scarcely heeded. She was a little startled to find that vocal prayer was becoming almost tedious, so much more captivating had purely mental prayer become. She could pass whole hours in the prayer of affection and contemplation, and had to bring herself back to vocal prayer, or prayer of mere petition, as to a duty, less spontaneous, and therefore less agreeable.

"Never mind," said the Poor Sister, to whom in one of their walks she spoke of this; "prayer is the intercourse of our souls with God, and, so long as His children are happy in His presence, He does not mind what we talk about."

"But are we not bound to prayer of petition by the Holy Rule? Is it not part of the Reparation?"

"Our public prayers satisfy whatever obligation there may be. And our little Rule does not bind

any of us under pain of sin, or fault; we keep it out of fidelity, not out of obligation."

"But I, too, want to keep it out of fidelity."

"And so you do, as long as you follow its spirit. Mental prayer is higher than vocal, the prayer of contemplation and affection higher than the prayer of petition. God does not expect us to do two things at once. It was Martha, not our Lord, who scolded Mary for sitting still and listening."

She paused a moment, and added:

"Don't even begin to be scrupulous. The reason why scruples are a mischief in Holy Religion is that they are a forgetfulness of God's kindness. Some good people are loud in asserting His pity to *sinner*s, but all the while seem to be accusing Him of wanting to take advantage of themselves."

Then she went on:

"You will not always find it thus either. Sometimes mental prayer is almost impossible, and our soul falls dumb. Then we can turn to vocal prayer, and fall back on the prayer of petition, which is concrete, and therefore normally much easier than that which is abstract."

"There are so many people to pray for, it seems as if one was neglecting them," said Marotz.

"What did I just say? No one can do two things at once. Moses was not neglecting those tiresome children of Israel when he stayed up in the mountain face to face with God. But presently he had to go down again. When that time came he was not turning away from God either. Only he had to do one thing at a time."

A nun came up and said:

"Poor Sister, one of the Extern Sisters wants to see you."

"Let her come here."

The Extern Sisters were allowed to come into the garden, and sometimes worked in it at weeding and such-like. One of them, it was the Portress, now came up and said that in the parlour was a Sister of Charity, who had a sister in the Reparation and wanted to speak to her, if possible.

"Sister Hedwig," said the foundress, calling a nun to her, "go to the parlour, where you will find your sister waiting to see you."

The nun hesitated a moment.

"Am I to go alone, Poor Sister?"

"Why not? Go alone, of course."

The other devout Religious still paused. She was dreadfully determined to do what was most perfect. Naturally it would be much pleasanter to see her sister alone, so she was anxious to be allowed to spoil this pleasantness.

"Our little postulant," she remarked, "has never been to the parlour. Shall I not take her?"

"I think your sister would rather see you alone. Go now, and don't keep her waiting."

Sister Hedwig went, only half pleased at being baulked of her perfection. However, she consoled herself by the thought that the will to do the more perfect thing had been hers.

When she had gone, Poor Sister smiled gently. "I'm afraid Sister Hedwig thinks I prevented her sticking a small jewel in her crown," she said to Marotz. "Of course she wanted to see her sister alone. So she proposed taking you. That's all

very well for her, but it would not be very kind to her sister, who has n't seen her for a long time."

"I should not have liked it at all either," said Marotz.

"Of course not. Sister Hedwig forgot all that. We must not let the pursuit of perfection make us selfish."

They both laughed, and Marotz said:

"How cross my father would be, if he came to the parlour to see me, and I brought Sister Hedwig with me!"

It was still early in the hour of recreation, and nearly half-an-hour later Poor Sister, who had in the meanwhile been walking with another nun, came up to Marotz again, and said, "You really shall come to the parlour now. I am going to take you. We will go and see if the Sister of Charity would care to come inside."

The parlour was an oblong bare room, divided into two unequal portions by a huge *grille* with dreadful iron spikes, two or three inches long. These spikes stuck out savagely on the worldly side of the *grille*; behind them was the nuns' parlour, which was the smaller section of the room.

Here they found Sister Hedwig seated on the floor, for there was no furniture. The walls were whitewashed, and their monotony was broken only by a small window on one side, and a large crucifix opposite to it.

Inside the iron *grille*, with the spikes, was a lighter wooden grating, and inside this a curtain of baize, now drawn back. Had the visitor on the other side been a man this green curtain would have stretched

between him and Sister Hedwig, so that they could not have seen one another, though of course they would have been quite able to talk.

As it was, both Poor Sister and Sister Hedwig had their long veils down, reaching to the knees. But the former immediately told Sister Hedwig to put hers back.

Marotz peered through the double *grille*, and saw a young Sister of Charity on the other side. She had a rather pleasant, comely face, but, if nuns may be supposed ever to look bored, it seemed to Marotz that the girl in the huge white *cornette* was looking so.

The fact was, Sister Hedwig had been patronising her. When the Sister of Charity approached the convent she had naturally compared it with her own, and the comparison was, equally naturally, all in favour of the big, useful, busy orphanage whence she came.

She rang at the bell of the Extern Sisters' lodge, and, as she stood in the street waiting for it to be answered, assured herself that the delay was merely part of the "contemplative airs" of the place. The real fact was that the stout, and by no means youthful, portress had fallen asleep over some darning of woollen socks (for the afternoon was warm) and did not at first hear the bell.

Then Sister Mary of St. Vincent rang again, and the little portress awoke. Naturally she peeped first through the small grilled hole in the door before opening it, and then remembered she had left the key in the chapel. As she walked rather slowly this occasioned a further delay. Finally the door was

opened, and the Sister of Charity asked if she could see her sister, Sister Hedwig.

"I will go and ask; please come in." And the portress led the visitor along some dark, cool passages to the Extern parlour.

The reader has already been introduced to the other half of it; there was nothing to be seen in the larger portion except a wooden table, two wooden chairs, and a crucifix.

"Please sit down," said the portress, pointing a key at one of the chairs; and then Sister Mary of St. Vincent was left alone.

"She only looks half alive," thought she, which was true in so far as the elderly lay sister was certainly only half awake. She only had one real meal a day, and was afflicted with a capacious appetite, so that on warm days she was apt to feel drowsy after dinner.

Sister Mary of St. Vincent eyed the *grille*, and, as there were no *grilles* in her own convent, saw no good in it.

"The spikes ought to be the other way," she thought; "I'm sure there's more chance of their wanting to get out than of our wanting to get in."

If her sister patronised her about the superiority of the contemplative vocation to the active, she determined she would repeat this pleasantry aloud.

Behind the iron grating she could see the wooden one, and beyond that the thick woollen curtain.

"I wonder if some one is there all the time?" she conjectured. "Perhaps a nun is watching me all the time through a hole," she thought.

Then she reminded herself of St. Vincent, and how he had said to his spiritual daughters, "Your

veil shall be modesty, your cloister the streets and the lanes of the city." And she liked her own vocation best.

It was not, of course, her first visit to the Reparation; but she came very seldom, for Sisters of Charity do not indulge in idle visiting, and for some time she had been in a house of her institute far from this place.

Sister Hedwig was much older than herself, and had become a nun long ago. They had not ever seen much of each other.

Presently a distant door opened, then another nearer, and finally that of the room behind the *grille*. But she could hear no footsteps even now, for the Reparation nuns wore peculiar sandals with thick straw soles.

"May the Holy Ghost fill you with His Light and with His Love," said a voice behind the *grille*, and then the curtain was drawn back.

"Gott grüsse dich," responded the Sister of Charity. She could see nothing of her sister except her dun-coloured habit, her bare feet with the queer sandals, and the long veil reaching to her knees, through which it seemed strange that the contemplative could see at all.

Sister Hedwig put out both her hands through the grating, and the other nun took them in hers, and stooping down kissed them.

"How are you?" she inquired genially.

"Always well," replied the veiled voice. "And you, dear sister?"

"I, too, am never ill. But our mother has been ill. . . ."

And then they both sat down, having loosed

each other's hands, the Sister of Charity on her rather high chair, the other on the floor. Sister Mary of St. Vincent would have liked, she thought, to sit on the floor, too; it seemed awkward to be so much higher up.

They fell to talking of family matters, and when that was done, of their respective convents.

"Ma Soeur has been very ill, with small-pox," said the Sister of Charity; "she caught it nursing a family that had it."

Sister Hedwig condoled, but with a perceptible tinge of jealousy. Poor Sister had suffered, merely, from a little indigestion.

However, Poor Sister was sure to be canonised one of these days, and where would the superiority be then? Her heroic sanctity was not obscurely hinted at, but Sister Mary of St. Vincent was not much impressed. No doubt her sister's superior was an excellent person, but her elevated spiritual station did not seem particularly useful.

"For years," declared Sister Hedwig, "she has been in the unitive way."

Her sister knew nothing about the unitive way, and said so.

At some length the contemplative explained, and the more she explained the more it was apparent that active religion is miles below contemplative in dignity.

No wonder Sister Mary of St. Vincent was looking bored, though unconvinced, when Marotz and Poor Sister arrived to her rescue.

"Would you like to come inside and see our little convent?" asked the latter.

"Oh, may I? Is your enclosure for poor Sisters of Charity like me?"

Poor Sister guessed immediately what had been happening. She laughed, her gentle, kind little laugh, and said cheerfully:

"Don't be silly, my dear!"

CHAPTER XXI

SISTER MARY of St. Vincent did not pay a very long visit, but it was long enough to convince Marotz that there did really seem something higher in the contemplative vocation than the active. The Sisters of the Reparation were more truly nuns, and they had a peculiar elevation of spirit that she missed in the Sister of Charity. Their ethical range struck her as wider and deeper, as well as being higher. No doubt the work in which Sister Mary of St. Vincent passed her life, and to which with entire personal unselfishness she devoted every waking hour, was as useful as it was laborious and self-sacrificing. But, oddly enough, it had narrowed her. In other works of charity she appeared incapable of taking any interest, and her purview of the great Church was bounded by the walls of her orphanage. Sister Gertrude of the Reparation had a niece in the Good Shepherd Order, and Sister Mechtild had a cousin in the homely Order of Nazareth, and of their work the two Reparation nuns spoke with admiration, but Sister Mary of St. Vincent listened with indifference, almost with inattention, and with a lack of appreciation that might have been taken for jealousy by less charitable judges.

Of their own institute the Reparation sisters scarcely spoke at all, and Marotz observed this

with a pleased admiration of their higher spiritual courtesy.

She could not help speaking of this during the next day's recreation.

"What you remark in our visitor of yesterday," said Poor Sister, "may be partly incorrect, and, in so far as it is correct at all, due rather to her personal character than to the fact that she is a Sister of Charity."

"You mean that perhaps I was unjust."

"We are often unjust when we think we have been keenly observant."

This was not said severely, but so frankly that Marotz could not feel herself snubbed.

"First of all," laughed Poor Sister, "it must have been rather an ordeal for one defenceless Sister of Charity to find herself exposed to the observation of thirteen veiled contemplatives. And the fact that one of them was her own elder sister must have made it worse. Of course she was shy."

"She did n't seem a bit shy."

"No. You thought she seemed a little—well, grumpy. No wonder; you may be sure our dear little Sister Hedwig had been patronising her."

Marotz laughed and protested that Poor Sister was after all more uncharitable than she was.

"Oh, I'll be charitable to Sister Hedwig presently. Hospitality demands that I should do justice to the stranger first! I maintain she was *not* grumpy, but merely felt awkward. And obviously she could not see that our life here did much good to any one."

"*We* could all see that *her* sort of life does immeasurable good."

"*Any one* could see that. No unbeliever attempts to deny the incomparable self-sacrifice and humanitarian purposefulness of a Sister of Charity. To see that much implies no great perception on our part. But the usefulness of an existence devoted to contemplation is not obvious."

"It requires insight."

"Admitting what you imply—that Sister Mary of St. Vincent lacked the insight: what then? That is not because she is a Sister of Charity, but because she happens to want a certain, by no means common, mental quality."

"Won't you admit that her active vocation would not foster it?"

"Yes, if you like. Their occupation is to act, ours only to consider."

Poor Sister paused a moment and then said:

"What I am trying to say is this. Suppose it were true that our visitor failed to show all the appreciation one admires, it would be still unfair to conclude that this was due to anything but a merely personal limitation."

"I should think that, among the same number of Sisters of Charity, there would be more visible difference of character than there is between the members of this institute."

"Oh yes. We are very few and always live together in an interminable aloofness from the rest of the world. They are perpetually meeting other people, and by no means permanently associating with the same small number of their own Order. They change from convent to convent, and in each convent meet new companions."

"That should tend to make them larger-minded. Do you tell me to believe they are larger-minded than your sisters here?"

"Indeed, no. No one could be more universal-minded than our sisters. The Sisters of Charity are always, after all, doing much the same sort of things, and on those their minds are bent. Here we have *everything* to think of."

"Poor Sister! Is their work more necessary than your contemplation?"

"It seems so. But it is not higher."

"The active vocation is much commoner; I mean more general."

"Certainly. For one contemplative there are probably thousands of active Religious. Because, for one thing, action is much easier, even the most difficult action. And mankind is more alive to the needs that the active Religious labour to supply. When Martha was 'cumbered' there were many hungry guests, but there was only One Christ at whose feet Mary was fain to sit and listen."

"And now," laughed Marotz, "it's time to be charitable to Sister Hedwig."

Poor Sister laughed too.

"By all means. But she does not much require our charity. She was overflowing with loyalty and *esprit de corps*, and failed to remember that her sister was defenceless. She probably felt *herself* on the defensive, and so rushed into a strategically offensive position out of nervousness."

"Why should she feel on the defensive?"

"Because she was conscious that the *point* of our life might not strike an active Religious."

CHAPTER XXII

MENTION has been made of a green courtyard round which the cloisters ran, and in the middle of which stood a large Calvary. There were buried those of the institute that had already passed to God. Of those who live as most of us do that phrase is charitable; but here it did not seem to Marotz descriptive. They had been with Him even here.

She sat at the foot of the great Cross, on one of the steps, and wreathed flowers into a chaplet, to lay upon one of the graves. They were not many, and all were marked alike by a simple stone cross, on which was graven the name in Religion, and the date of death, of the sister whose body had been laid there. But one mound had no such cross. And for that one Marotz had gathered her flowers and was making her wreath. She did not know whose grave it was. The shadow of the Calvary fell upon it as she worked.

The Head of the Divine Sufferer was not thrown back, nor the eyes closed. It was bent downwards, and it seemed to Marotz that the pitiful gaze rested tenderly on the unnamed grave.

It was very still here, and Marotz fell to comparing it with the stillness of San Vito.

If one listened even, there came no sound whatever. The city lay beyond the huge gardens of the palace,

and behind the vast bulk of the palace itself. There was not a tree here to be rustled by a summer breeze, nor was there breeze to whisper in its leaves if there had been. No one was moving in the cloister, though a sister might be kneeling there before one of the stations.

In the convent there was always a quietness like that of a cool and shaded wood—but deeper. The nuns moved almost wholly without sound, with straw-sandalled feet, on paved floor and cloister. And even the garden, where they were now at recreation, was far from this empty court, and the sisters walking there spoke in gentle and low tones.

At San Vito there was silence too; but it was the silence of the South. Behind, indeed, lay the eternal quiet of the hills, more solemn than that of a forest, but less grave. But the stillness of the valley was echoed by sounds that could not violate it. The cicada and the sunlight were a part of the noon, and, one as much as the other, intensified its burning silence. To Marotz it seemed as if that panting stillness of the South were masculine and somehow active, this feminine and passive.

Presently Poor Sister joined her. And Marotz moved to make room, so that she herself sat just beneath the bent Head of the Figure on the Cross.

"I was sure I should find you here," said the foundress. "When you asked if you might pick the flowers, and went away with them, I thought I knew what you would do with them."

Marotz looked up and smiled.

"You do not mind my following you?"

"Indeed, no," the girl answered. "Did you guess also for which grave I wanted them?"

Poor Sister pointed to the unmarked mound, on which the shadow of the cross lay softly.

"Do you know whose tired head rests there?" she asked.

Marotz shook her head, adding another white flower to her wreath.

"She asked that no stone should mark it," said Poor Sister. "Perhaps you would like me to tell you about it." Marotz looked up again and gave her quiet consent. She knew that no inquisitiveness was imputed to her. "When I came here to pray, at first I had no idea of founding anything," the Poor Sister began. "They gave me leave to come; and the Emperor had this part of the great garden shut off for me. A very little wooden chapel was built where our altar stands now, and there was one small room where I slept, and ate, and read; no one came to watch or trouble me; it seemed soon as if no one remembered me at all. That was what I wished might be. I was only twenty then. At eighteen they had married me to a man who was my own far-away kinsman, about the same relation to the Emperor as I was. He was very handsome, and tall, and full of gaiety and life, with no love, it seemed, of anything but pleasure. And I was small, and plain, and shy, dreading the bustle and glitter of Court life, and not at all clever like the poor lad they had arranged should be my husband. There was nothing at all in me to interest him or attract him, and he was not either attracted or interested. As for me, I was ashamed to seem trying to arouse an affec-

tion that from almost the first I could see was quite absent. It seemed like reproaching him for what was not at all his fault. Only I tried to be less dull, to learn the things he cared about, and, perhaps, to be a little less ugly."

"You were never ugly," Marotz interrupted rather fiercely.

Poor Sister smiled.

"No one, I suppose, is really ugly who looks as God meant them to look. Anyway I was certainly not beautiful, and *he* cared above all things for beauty."

She paused a moment, and then the gentle voice continued, not as one accusing, but as one extenuating a fault that had had its root in blind misfortune: "To me he was not unkind. Not even impatient. He did not consider neglect was cruelty, and avoidance any insult. People in stations like ours, he took it for granted, had to marry where interest and policy pointed; but marriage led one way, 'love' another. Even I, simple as I was, felt it all; and even, silent as I was, and impervious to tale-bearing, knew him to be unfaithful. Of course I never spoke of it, to him, or any one. Scarcely to God: I dreaded to remind God of what he might be doing amiss. If I had complained to God of his injustice it would have seemed like calling for justice between us. And I guessed he had been made to marry me. . . . Then came the horrible quick end of it all. One lady there was, of whom I knew nothing, but she, too, was of nearly the same high rank as our own, and her husband was almost nearer to the Emperor than we were. One night, towards the end of a

great Court Ball, they came here, to this distant corner of the garden, and her husband followed them. To save her, God knows how it could, the injurer killed the injured, in swift, unreasoned passion and fury, kindled, I suppose, by the fury and passions of the other. Then the wretched wife, who suddenly felt she had still loved her husband, covered her lover with loathing and reproaches, and he slew himself."

Poor Sister did not weep as she told her hapless tale, but her voice was full of compassionate tears.

"So I came here to make my puny reparations," she went on, "and they let me be; they left me to my prayers and my tears. And I soon hoped that I was forgotten, as I seemed unheeded. But one night, it was moonlight and there was a scowling wind, and the door of my wooden chapel rattled. I grew suddenly lonely, and a sort of dread and nervousness crept about me, so that I stole to the door to fasten it. Just as I had done so, something made me unbolt it again, open it, and look out. On the grass outside some one was kneeling, and the chill moonlight fell on her face, so that I could see it was lovely. She reached out a hand to me and begged me let her stay. She came every night, she told me, and joined her prayers to mine. She began to tell me who she was, but of course I knew and would not let her. She came in with me, and in the little wooden chapel we prayed nearly all the night. She never went away, but stayed until she died, ten years afterwards; it did not seem to me that she had any disease, but her slight, exquisite body was like a wick that the flame it supports

burns out at last. No one could help loving her—God could not. Others came one by one and joined us, and so this little house of reparation grew—it was never founded. I am no foundress, only her poor sister. She had lain among the pots, but her wings were like dove's wings, and they lifted her into the clear, white light that scatters down from the great white throne, where God sits forever, by the crystal sea that no storm vexes ever, and no cloud darkens. And now she stands with happy eyes beholding forever the most clear truth."

A drop, like a tear, fell upon the hands of Marotz, that lay clasped about the wreath in her lap.

She looked up into the remote, blue floor of heaven, but there seemed no cloud.

The tender compassion of the Divine Eyes above her was bent always on the nameless mound. She rose and laid her flowers on it.

CHAPTER XXIII

THERE was no one but herself in the chapel, and it was nearly midnight, when the Community would gather there for Matins and Lauds.

Marotz, for almost the first time since she came to the Reparation, had not been able to fall asleep. But for a long time she had lain still out of obedience. The Rule was already a great deal to her, and, according to the Rule, she should be sleeping from about a quarter to nine till a quarter to twelve. So she tried to sleep, and then at least to lie still in her narrow and hard bed. The cell was full of moonlight, and the uncurtained window stood wide open, but no sound came through it; it looked, however, into the garden and let in a cool smell of grass and trees.

At last, when it was nearly eleven o'clock, she thought she might get up and go to choir and await the nuns' coming there.

The cloisters also were bathed in moonlight, and the great carved stone groups of the stations stood out with an almost terrible reality. The figures were nearly life size, and coloured in their natural tints.

The windows of the nuns' chapel looked away from the moon, and here all was dark except for the lamp before the Blessed Sacrament, which cast a pale glimmer on two statues that were almost

the only decoration of the enclosed chapel. They represented Our Lady and the other Mary, so unlike her in everything but name, and love. These figures were not niched and canopied, facing the spectator, but knelt on either side of the plain, austere-looking altar. The attitude in each was that of adoration, but the expression of the attitude was singularly different.

The faces of the two statues were turned to the tabernacle, and the suppliant entreaty of each was the same. But God's great Mother seemed to express the majesty of supplication, and the other Mary a passion of it.

At first Marotz knelt down in a stall and began a simple prayer of intercession. She had no particular place in choir; none of the sisters had; Poor Sister herself always entering last, and taking whatever stall seemed most obviously left unoccupied by any one else near the door.

Marotz prayed for the city outside, for those in sorrow there, those hungry perhaps, and anxious, laden with toil and debt, and fear of the threatening morrow; for those whose trouble was of their own breeding, to whom the inevitable Nemesis of folly and luxury and self-indulgence might be drawing nigh; for those whose trouble came of the cruel tangle of circumstance, untempted and undeserved. For the many sick, the fever-tossed, the pain-wracked, that God's gentle gift of rest and sleep might be borne down by some kind angel to their tired eyes. For the wicked who might even then be planning evil, and tempting others to it. For the good who laboured for others and for God, that they might

not grow weary and fail in purpose. For those who had never sinned yet, and for those who had never learned to keep from sin. For such as all these throughout the great world. For those who in other lands and climes were beginning their day of evil or of good, for those who had none to pray for them, and those who had never learned to pray for themselves.

And with a special gladness of tenderness she let her prayer encircle those known to herself and dear, for the far-away home among the dark mountains, and all it held, from her own parents to the peasant children of the little town, for old Zia, and for a certain lame beggar who sat by the church door at San Vito. And for all whose calling it was to pray for others, for herself even, that she too might learn to pray.

Then it seemed to her that her attention wandered, and the string of supplication broke in her hands. But she remembered Poor Sister's gentle admonition, and let her prayer lapse into the mere sense of God.

"After all, He remembers all whom I perhaps forget," she told herself, and left them to Him, without self-reproach or flurry.

"*'Cor autem Meum vigilat,'*" she heard Him reminding her; and she thought of the world-old vigil of that Divine Heart that became human too. "*Abyssus abyssum invocat,*" and the shallow deep of her one little human being cried out to the eternal divine deep from which it came, to which it was bent, whither it tended. It seemed quite near. She had no thought of Him far up in some remote heaven, infinitely removed by His austere perfection, but

at hand, close to, nearer to herself than her own body could ever get to her soul. She could not speak, she dared not, and she did not wish to, not even to pray. She durst not interrupt. The function of faith seemed abdicated, for faith is the substance of things that appear not, the evidence of that to be hoped for. They were come.

Hope, too, had lost its present meaning, for possession had been given to her. A new sense had been born in her, by which God Himself made Himself known, as visible things are beheld by sight, and sounds come to us by hearing, things tangible by bodily contact. There was no suspicion of delusion: she saw no vision, heard no word, felt no hand touch her. It was an appreciation much higher. Without the faculty of sight or touch or hearing, she saw and felt and heard. Then there came the recollection that close to, a few feet away, was the Divine-Human, the Man who was God. And irresistibly she rose from her place and went to Him.

Was it an impertinence? Some taking of a liberty, seizing the advantage of her being there alone with Him? It seemed not; a simple impulse, nay, an obedience. He had called her. There had been no voice, but the command of silent Majesty that need not speak.

She went quite close between the two kneeling statues, and knelt herself. The door of the tabernacle was almost within arm's length, and the glimmering yellow light of the lamp in front flickered on it. The chapel seemed dark no longer, she had grown so accustomed to it; the altar itself lay in a soft golden radiance.

How near He was! The feet that had been scarred, the hands that had lifted the lame and set them walking, the arms outstretched that He might draw all things to Himself. Close to, close to, lay the breast on which the beloved of his friends had leant that supper-time.

Had the door of the tabernacle opened, and He Himself come forth, she could not have been surprised, but He would not have rendered Himself more actual. His presence had annihilated time and space; she was with Him: there was neither where nor when. Only she was with Him, as Mary sitting at His feet was with Him at Bethany, as the children who played about His knees in the temple courts, as the two who walked that first Sunday evening to Emmaus.

She did not imagine that she saw His face, or heard His human voice, but she knew she was close beside Him, and no one can be near Him without sharing in His teaching. Of the five thousand on the hillside many perhaps caught few of His articulate words, but all were taught, as all were fed. Not only the bread was multiplied; all took away some of what fell from His lips, though they had scarcely been near enough to see them move.

The slow change of time had lost significance, the modern was as far off as the ancient: the outside of to-day was as remote from her, and as trivial, as Rome was to the peasants lying on the grass.

"My Beloved is One."

She was not without thought, but she rested in her thoughts as in a bark that carried her, without effort of hers, on the ocean that lies fathomless beneath all thinking. From one little port of con-

clusion to another thought bears us, sometimes stormily, but the great water that divides and joins them is eternal truth itself. And truth is only another name of Him; as love is, and light.

She made no effort to think, scarcely to listen, merely to learn, in happy silence.

Yet she did think—of a thousand things that there is not space to write of here. Poignantly of the long vigil of the Blessed Sacrament through time, till time's rivers shall have run dry and given their last drop to the final sea that we call eternity. Of the patience of that waiting and its Divine Silence.

Memory lifted her on more than one calmly swelling wave; there was the First Procession of the Blessed Sacrament, when Mary went with haste into the hill country of Judæa, just after the Annunciation, and the unsuspected Christ was borne within her breast; as, ever since, on the priests', He lets Himself be carried through the city streets to the dying, that He may join them on the last journey, and go out with them, from this darkness, into the light that lies beyond the chill river.

And there was His birth-night, when, after all, only His Godhood was veiled, in that Bethlehem, that first House of Bread; nay, she thought of the round white food that fell for Israel from heaven, day by day, in the wilderness of Sin; whereof the dull, self-seeking, world-loving people grew sick at last, longing back to the flesh-pots of foul Egypt; whereof, even at the first, they had cried, "Manna? What is it, this thin, slight food?" more scornfully than gratefully. That great saying of St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi fell through her memory, as a

sunlight falls through clear water, "Of a truth Thou hast made a Fool of Thyself, Christ, for the love of man."

Certainly a fool as the world counts folly. What could He gain by it all? Nothing for Himself. . . .

But each several memory was part of one, of the astounding prodigality of Divine Love that has no measure but to love without measure. Could any man have invented God, could any one short of God have imagined the Blessed Sacrament?

She thought of the Lazarus Christ, lying at the gates of humanity, and begging for the waste crumbs of man's love that fall from his feasting-table, and yet not crying nor lifting up His voice in all His holy mountain.

And then first she began to suffer. The poignant pathos of man's perennial refusal, and God's eternal pleading, pierced her, and the horror of the wounds with which He is forever wounded in the house of His friends. Not in her hands or feet did she feel the torment of the nails, but in her soul.

She thought of the fire He came to cast upon the earth, and she herself was burned into it.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN Matins and Lauds were over, and the Miserere had been sung, Marotz left the chapel with the rest. But she could not leave Him. He went with her.

In her own cell she found Him waiting, and this time she could not even try to sleep. To lie down upon her hard board seemed as if one should assume some disrespectful posture in the presence of the King. She thought how St. Theresa calls him always His Majesty, and it no longer seemed quaint.

But kings are seldom friends, and His friendship seemed easier to remember than His majesty.

So she knelt and at last she slept.

For more than a week this overwhelming sense of God continued, and she spoke as little as she could to any one else, even to Poor Sister. There was only one thing she could speak of, and to speak of that was like telling the Secret of the King.

The nuns left her, not alone, but to herself.

Then almost suddenly it ended, and there came a change that at first seemed merely ghastly.

She could not pray. And when she tried, her words came aloud, and from the surface of her lips; it seemed as if her heart had grown dumb, and God himself was deaf. She cried out to Him, but there was no voice nor any that answered.

At times it was like a hot darkness, in which nothing lived and nothing moved, but in which she alone gasped and stifled in a loathsome nightmare. Then it was as though she panted in a blinding desert, but there was no shadow of a great rock in all the weary land, nowhere where she could hide her own naked presence, no stream to cool her parched lips and unloose her tied tongue, no defence against the staring light wherein everything stood out blank and unreal, yet hard and hot and glaring, without shadow and without distance. Everything became a monstrous picture, that no one could believe in; false, impossible, and yet insistent. God Himself seemed dead; and her own body had no soul in it, which is death.

"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"

What had she done? why was she punished? and why should there be sent a punishment greater than she could bear?

Out of the horror of thirst that burned her dried-up soul she cried. And only vinegar and gall were given her. Acrid and sour seemed every echo that came to her from the voices to which she turned for explanation and help.

Hidden in her cell she read chapter after chapter of such as had written for guidance of those who live in the deep silence of the cloister. But bitter as gall seemed *The Following of Christ*, intolerably sad and melancholy and desolate; Scupoli had set his words to a harsh, strident tone; and *The Castle of the Soul* barred its gates against her, and St. Theresa stared out, from behind them, frowningly.

She turned to the Preacher, and could only hear him saying, "All go to one place. Of the dust all

are and all turn back to dust again." She felt like dust already, dry and parched, and full of specks that were unclean and blinding. "That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth the beasts. Even one thing befalleth them both: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that man hath no pre-eminence over a beast: for it is all alike vanity." "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" "All his days he eateth in darkness. . . . He cometh in with vanity and departeth in darkness, and with darkness shall his name be covered." "All the labour of man is for his food, and yet his appetite is not filled." "All the days of his vain life that he spendeth are a shadow, and who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?"

She turned to the Apocalypse, but her dazed eyes could not look through the gates of pearl: they stuck at the gateway, for every several gate is a pearl. And for sorrow do pearls stand. "Because thou art neither cold or hot," she heard a cold voice saying, "I will begin to spit thee out of my mouth."

Far away in the south there had been days when the scirocco had made her body feel as her soul felt now; but that *had* been the body only. Her soul choked now, in a clammy stifle in which it seemed impossible to be clean. A leaden weight oppressed her spirit, and pushed it down into the hot dust.

Where was God? What had happened to Him? Heaven was as brass; and, lifting piteous hands

to it, there came back only the echoing clang of her own striking at its gates. It seemed as if there was no one inside. The saints stood stiff in a mummied sleep, the angels had dried up like mists of the hopeful morning in a pitiless noon.

She was afraid to go to the chapel lest some nun praying there should see her face, and be horrified at the blank misery that must be written on it. Still she felt she must go there.

It was empty; and the sun was beating down into it from the high windows; kneeling down in a hidden corner, she tried to rest her aching spirit in the simple, easy prayer of petition.

But it was not easy; it was not even possible. If she prayed for sinners a hateful curiosity assailed her, and the thought of their sins, like an ugly picture, wove itself swiftly into her imaginations. She shook her head impatiently as if she could shake out the thoughts that stung her like unclean flies.

Her prayer for the wicked seemed to contaminate herself.

Where was God? Why could she not speak to Him? Why would no prayer go out of her? Her whispered words stuck to herself, like burs, and refused to mount higher than her own lips. It was a mere mockery, kneeling there and beginning prayer after prayer which she could not attend to. She got up and went away. It would be better to read some book of a narrative sort, such as a saint's life, which would call for mere attention, and would make no demand on a spiritual sense that withered. So she went to the library, and that too she thought was empty, though in reality a nun was reading in a

deep oriel, Sister Mechtild, a quiet, cheerful creature whom she had always liked, but with whom she had not had much special talk. Marotz chose a book because it was in Italian, and dealt with the life of an eighteenth century saint whose work had lain chiefly in Sicily and Calabria. But it was hopelessly stilted and uninteresting; the saint's virtues were given one by one, his humility filled all Chapter XI, his mortifications were detailed throughout Chapter XII, his labours and preaching followed in Chapters XIII and XIV. The beginning of Chapter XV made her suddenly laugh aloud, but her laughter echoed hardly in the still library. Her merriment was not cheerful.

"While the servant of God was thus occupied," said the chronicler, "the devil was not idle. For his most reverend Excellency the Bishop of Santa Chiara forbade our saint to preach any more in his diocese. . . ."

Sister Mechtild came out of her corner; the crackle of laughter was like the burning of thorns under a pot, and it seemed to the quiet nun a cry for help from a child in pain.

"What is it, Marotz?" she asked her gently, coming close, with a shy kindness.

"Oh, I didn't know any one was there; I am afraid my laughing disturbed you," and Marotz pointed to the queer passage in the dull black book.

Sister Mechtild read it, smiling quietly.

"Poor Saint!" she said; "if he had any imperfections it would be purgatory enough to make him read a life like this. But Marotz, dear child, your laugh sounded so unhappy."

Marotz hesitated. Ought she to carry her weight in silence? Would it be cowardice to seek human sympathy in it? But the little nun looked so shy, and so kind; she feared that if she said nothing Sister Mechtild would be hurt, as if she had been intrusive. So Marotz told her.

"Dear little Marotz," said Mechtild (the top of whose head was about on a level with the postulant's shoulder), "I thought it was that."

They sat down together in the deep oriel window, and Marotz listened while the other told her how inevitable this hideous "dryness" was.

"It always comes," she said. "Do not fear that it is God's punishment for some fault. It is a trial, but a trial of love. It is nothing personal. I was afraid you would think it was something peculiar to yourself, perhaps a sign that you are not meant for this place."

Oddly enough this natural idea had not occurred to the postulant.

"No," she said, "I never thought of that. But I did think it something peculiar to myself."

"Marotz," said Sister Mechtild, "it is what comes to all in the spiritual life. With me it began seven years ago."

"And how long did it last?" the girl asked quickly.

"It is lasting still," the nun answered simply.

Marotz looked at the sweet, calm face, the smile that was so gentle and so cheerful, and felt herself blushing. For seven years! And the fuss that she herself had made after bearing it a day or two!

"Have you never asked God to take it away?"

"Oh yes. At first I did. And it went away."

Then I was ashamed. I remembered why one came here. And I was ashamed of having cried out against a little suffering. What right have we to expect Heaven to begin on earth? The beatific vision immediately is no part of God's promise to those who take up His cross and follow after Him. So I told Him I would try and drag it along with me if it came back, and it did."

"For seven years," said Marotz in a low voice, and in spite of herself she trembled.

"Jacob was in servitude for seven years for a girl with red eyes," laughed Mechtild in her quiet voice.

"Yes, but he was cheated," protested Marotz. "God is not Laban."

"No. But Jacob did n't mind them nor the other seven for Rachel's sake. Is n't God worth as much as Rachel?"

For a moment both were silent, while Marotz thought, and Mechtild watched her with a tender interested sympathy. Then the nun spoke again.

"Dear Marotz, we were not left without warning; the crown of thorns is for us as well as Him. The servant is not above his master. It is enough if the servant be as his master. There was the Agony in the Garden, and there was the loud and bitter cry, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' What can we expect?"

Marotz remembered then of what a King she was aspiring to be a courtier.

CHAPTER XXV

"THE world," said Poor Sister, "understands neither our loss nor our gain."

Marotz and she and Sister Mechtild were walking together along the high wall beyond which lay the palace garden. Over it the trees, whose roots were in the world, leaned, and threw their shade, and scattered their golden hopes in autumn.

"It is funny," said Mechtild, "how angry a certain sort of people are with us for being nuns. They pretend it is because they think us useless; but they are just as angry with Sisters of Charity."

"And not a bit angry with old maids," interjected Poor Sister, "who do nothing but save their money, and play picquet with their maids or one another."

"Perhaps," laughed Marotz, "they think the old maids can't help it."

"For my part," declared Mechtild, "I like old maids. Those with a vocation to be old maids are excellent people."

Marotz laughed again. "One would think Sister Mechtild had a dozen children with measles for an unmarried aunt of theirs to take off her hands and nurse."

They walked on a little way in silence, and presently Poor Sister went on with what she had been saying.

"Those who criticise us most hardly," she said,

"are least capable of understanding what they are so cross about. They scold us for making ourselves miserable, and never realize that our happiness is greater than their own. They are angry because we give up 'the world,' and are savage because we don't mind it. On the other hand, they very seldom appreciate what it really is we do give up. Smart and fine clothes, dainty feeding, the clatter of 'society,' the pride of life, who cares about turning away from them? Who keeps her lover longest, the girl who marries, or she who comes here? Death cannot steal, nor custom stale, for us.

"The great thing we give up," she added, "is not marriage, but children. Yet it is scarcely ever that we are pitied for. To have sons and daughters is almost like being God."

Nothing could be nobler, Marotz thought, than Poor Sister's plain, calm face as she said this.

"That *is* something worth giving up," she added, with a quiet gladness that it was so. "One would feel mean if, after all, one had gained so much and given *nothing*." Then she laughed her low, extraordinarily gentle laugh, and said, "But it is hopeless trying to bandy generousities with God. We soon cease to be so stupid as to imagine He will be outdone. Great kings only accept gifts from subjects to give greater in return. Here in our little cloister we find every one's children are our own. It is true we don't see them much, they are all away at school; but they are there, and we go on caring more and more for every one of them."

Presently Sister Mechtild, who was infirmarian,

went away to attend on a Sister who was a little unwell.

"It is really a pity we are all so well," laughed Poor Sister. "I often feel it heartless to be never ill; Sister Mechtild would be so delighted to have a real patient. She is a most perfect nurse, and it seems selfish to deprive her of what would be such a pleasure. You sneezed at supper last night, and I thought you were getting a cold to oblige her; but it was only pepper."

"Poor Sister," Marotz asked, in her direct fashion, "do you think I shall stay here?"

"That is asking if I believe you have a vocation to our life."

"I hope so. But are not some people mistaken?"

"Certainly some people have become Religious who had no vocation; that is why there have been bad monks and nuns. Some women have, alas! been forced to make profession of Holy Religion against their will. To such as those God would *give* vocation afterwards if they deserved it. Others have come of their own accord for something short of the only true reason. But, Marotz, you are not here at any one's urging, and if you stop it will be because you have decided that God has really called you hither."

"Do *you* believe He does call me?"

"Marotz, Marotz! who am I that I can force myself into God's confidence? Some signs, half outward, one may think one sees, or think one misses. That is all. And no signs are infallible either way."

"In my case, then, how do such signs appear?"

"*Kleinchen*, why care to know what I may think?

Still, I will tell you as freely as I can, since you do ask; you have shown, so far as I have seen, no evidences of *not* having our vocation; but I have not watched you."

"And you have seen no evidence that I *have* this vocation?"

"Yes, there have seemed many signs. But if you told me to-morrow, told me now, that you do not wish to stay here, that you do not find yourself bidden by God to remain here, I should feel sure that you could yourself be trusted to decide rightly."

Marotz had questioned her rather closely and persistently, but Poor Sister retorted with no inquiry in her turn. She was resolved to spoil no work of God's, to interfere in no slightest way.

"There is a bad reason for coming here, though by no means the worst," she went on. "Have we not heard of men who so dreaded death, that they could not steadfastly await his inevitable chill coming and blindly leapt to meet him? The knowledge that they must die was so intolerable that they have slain themselves at once, rather than let him steal upon them, at his own hateful leisure, in the dark."

She paused, and Marotz bent her grave eyes on the ground, divining instantly what was coming.

"So do some fly into religion. Because life, and youth, and human love are not to last, they rush shuddering from them at once. Rather than be forgotten at some far-off time, when age shall have spoilt beauty, and chilled hope, they cry to the mountains of oblivion to fall on them forthwith, and to the hills of forgetfulness to cover them to-day.

Is this any cheerful acceptance of God's will, any decent gratitude for His princely gift of life? Impatient cowardice is not submission."

Marotz was frankly asking herself if this had been her case; not quite, she felt.

In yonder palace, in the balcony, with the throbbing music pulsing through her, a man had stood and offered her life, as she thought. And with a profound curiosity and eagerness she had thought of what his offering might mean. But on the morrow another Man had offered her life too, only He had offered it more abundantly, though more austere. She had never thought of death in coming here. It had not been to blunt his scythe betimes, to make friends with the arch-adversary while she was in the way with him, she had come.

"No, Poor Sister," she said with her plain candour that at once convinced, "that did not bring me here."

"Our sisters," said her companion presently, "would like you to stay because they love you, and because they love our little institute. But that is no argument that you should stay."

"And you yourself, Poor Sister?"

"Do I love you? Yes, and this house of loving, though inadequate, reparation. But God is more than any one way of serving Him, and absence is a bridge across which love passes unrestrained. Have you cared less, while you have been here, for those dearest to you? Have they seemed more remote?"

No, Marotz knew that they had never been so near, and so accessible at every moment to her tenderness.

"If you do leave us, Marotz, I shall feel there is nothing between us, nothing to divide; only the link of space, filled by God, in whom we both are. And, Marotz," she went on, "if, after all, you do not find that you are to stay here, mind, it is no failure. Success is doing what we are intended for; if the king asks for bread, a diamond is only harder than any other stone." Her voice grew still gentler as she added, "And if you go back to the 'world,' do not let your stay here have put you out of conceit with it. Do not measure it by our standard here; one can't weigh bricks and mortar comfortably by troy weight, but houses are useful, and only a few could be built if all had to be wrought of rare metals. Do not confuse coarse character with wickedness, do not be too hard even on wickedness itself. If God can be patient with it, surely we can. Do you remember the story of Abraham and the hungry traveller?"

"No; where is it written?"

"Perhaps nowhere; it may be some Eastern legend. But I heard it long ago, and I love it. Once Abraham was sitting in his tent-door as the sun was setting, and thanking God in his heart for all the wealthy comfort of his life. Presently an old man came limping by, very weary, with torn and bruised feet. He was nearly a hundred years old and a penniless, starved wanderer. Moved with a rich man's easy compassion, he bade the hungry traveller come in, and set him down to meat. When the stranger had eaten and drunk, Abraham asked him sternly, 'Why didst thou not thank God for the refreshment He has sent thee by my hands?' 'I thank

thee,' said the old man, 'for thou hast been charitable to me. God I thanked not, because I knew not of Him, or if there be any God.' Whereupon the righteous soul of the patriarch burned within him, and with his staff he belaboured the blasphemer. Then, tired with his exercise, but pleasantly elevated by the sense of his zeal, he sat down, and God called to him without the tent. And Abraham went to receive His commendations. 'Fourscore years,' said God, 'I have borne with that man. Couldst thou not bear with him one night?'"

CHAPTER XXVI

"EVEN good people," said Poor Sister, in another recreation, "sometimes seem unable to mount higher on the ladder of perfection than a chronic abhorrence of sin. They are always thinking of it. On the ladder that Jacob saw there were only angels."

It had struck Marotz from the beginning that in the convent there was never any talk of sin, any more than there was of mortification. They lived hardly, but never spoke of it, and, she was sure, thought of it very little. Of other people's faults they never talked at all."

"And the people who are less good," continued Poor Sister, "seem positively to enjoy the wide prospect of depravity they can catch through their nasty telescopes. By a lingering, prurient exaggeration of evil outside they appear to think themselves ornamented. I cannot think God likes us to pry too closely on evil. He is 'of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.'"

Long afterwards Marotz looked back on these quiet talks and gathered help from them. She never forgot the convent garden, with the nuns pacing its plain alleys, and some of them at work in quaintly tucked-up habit, the happy peace and gentle comradeship of all.

The reader may call her stupid for her slight

contribution to what was said, but for my part I think she was not stupid to prefer, mostly, listening. She was never very wordy all her life, and she learned more by thinking than by thrusting her slowly growing thoughts into speech.

"Above all," said Poor Sister, "one must fear the danger of thinking others beneath ourselves. We learn a little lesson, and are immediately in danger of condemning those who have not yet learned the same page, as if God put all His children at once into the same class. We, who know scarcely anything of ourselves, are so ready to decide about other people whose very faces we have only seen in certain lights. Here is another story. There was a cenobite once in the Thebaid. He had served God with fasting and incessant prayer for nearly fifty years, and it seemed to him he had progressed far. He wondered how far, and asked God to reveal it to him. He was lifted in the spirit and set down in the great city of Alexandria. It was late night, and the streets were empty, shining white, with black shadows along the walls, under the moon. In the strip of shadow God set him, and said, 'Thou hast reached to such a point of perfection as the first man that thou shalt see here.' Presently a door opened, and from it the ugly jangle of tipsy revelry came out to smite the stillness of the night. It was the door of a tavern, and from it staggered forth a drunken soldier."

"I hope," said Marotz, "that the moral is that the soldier was not so bad as he looked; not merely that the poor cenobite was n't so good as he thought!"

"True stories have n't got a moral," laughed Poor Sister, "but I take it your way."

"Charity," she added after one of her characteristic pauses, which often seemed to Marotz as instructive as anything she put into words, "charity does not blunt our moral sense, but sheathes it: cold steel needs a scabbard. Our Lord was 'a friend of publicans and sinners.' That did not mean that their vices did not matter, or that he admired them for their faults, and we are to choose bad company. His beloved disciple was St. John the Divine."

"Among the Apostles," observed Marotz, "St. Paul seems to me like Shakespeare, and St. John like Dante."

"Well, Marotzchen, St. Paul was universal like Shakespeare, but Dante is not tender and sweet like St. John. He gazes at high things, but he gazes coldly. One can imagine that if he had been inspired he might have written the Apocalypse; but before he could have written the fourteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel he must have been given ineffable love as well as inspiration. He understands Purgatory and Hell better than Heaven, but St. Catherine of Genoa's Purgatory is nobler and more true. Dante could never have thought what she says, 'If God were not to bid the imperfect wait in Purgatory, they would themselves leap into it.'"

Both women were silent for a while, then Marotz quoted from the third canto of the *Purgatorio* the dying Manfred's speech:

"Poi sorridendo disse, 'Io son Manfredi
Nipote di Costanza imperadrice:
Ond' io ti prego che quando tu riedi
Vade a mia bella figlia, genitrice

Dell' onor di Cicilia e d' Aragona,
 E dichi a lei il ver, s' altro si dice.
 Poscia ch' i' ebbi rotta la persona
 De due punte mortali, *io mi rendei*
Piangendo a quei che volentier perdona.
Orribil furon, li peccati miei;
Ma la bontà infinita ha sì gran braccia
Che prende ciò che si rivolge a lei.
 Se 'l pastor di Cosenza, ch' alla caccia
 Di me fu messo per Clemente, allora
 Avesse in Dio ben letta questa faccia,
 L' ossa del corpo mio sariano ancora
 In cò del ponte, presso a Benevento,
 Sotto la guardia della grave mora.
 Or le bagna la pioggia, e muove il vento
 Di fuor dal regno, quasi lungo 'l Verde,
 Ove le trasmutò, a lume spento.' "

Marotz had stood there, "by the bridge at Benevento," and her voice was full of the echo of her father's passionate compassion as he had talked with her of the broken hero, whose large faults would have made virtues for fifty common men. Poor Sister listened with tears in her silence; her mother had been a Tuscan archduchess, and the majestic splendour of simplicity in the glorious Italian words carried, besides its own pathos, the tenderness of immortal memories folded in that exquisite language.

"There is no other poet whose words would sound beautiful even if one did not understand them," she said at last. Then, with another of her gentle laughs, added, "All the same, I cannot forgive him for putting San Celestino Quinto upside down in Hell. What a blessing it is that we are none of us to be sent there by each other! One sort of man, if he were judge, would condemn all the saints to eternal

torments because the poor things were men, not angels. It is only God who has patience with the good as well as with the sinners. He alone remembers that we are but dust, and knoweth whereof we are made. Infinite mercy is a gentler name for infinite knowledge. Which of *us* would dare to say 'Heaven' if his own lot had to be decided even by himself? It is not God who expects us to be monsters of sanctity."

"Poor Sister, to tell the truth, nothing real annoys me. People's faults are mostly genuine."

The old nun liked this saying, but pulled its tail, so to speak, with a cheerful and friendly mischievousness.

"Such as their affectation and vulgarity and pretentiousness?"

Marotz laughed, but refused to tumble into the pit she had digged for herself.

"Some people's vulgarity is the only real thing about them visible to the naked eye. I don't mind it then. It is n't out of place."

"But then it is n't vulgar. You would make faces over a vulgar princess."

"I remember one. She rushed across a ball-room to tell me Countess Ixe's grand opera-cloak was lined with *calico*."

"And you did make faces? Confess it."

"I did worse. I said, 'Perhaps calico lining is all she can *pay* for.' I admit affectation, when it is n't shyness, bores me."

"Well, well, after all it's God's world," said Poor Sister, "and even man has not been able to spoil it."

"And man himself is God's man, and can't forget it always."

And Poor Sister liked this too.

CHAPTER XXVII

A FEW days after this Poor Sister brought Marotz a letter. It was, she saw at once, from her mother. And as soon as the old nun had given it to the girl, she left her alone to read it. She would no more have thought of reading it herself, according to her right as superioress, than she would have thought of listening behind a door to what two sisters might be talking about, when they did not know she was by. It was September now, and Marotz had been three months at the Reparation. The summer was not gone, and the days were still hot and staring.

Lucia wrote of all that she knew would interest the girl, and her effort to be entirely cheerful had been unselfishly great. But she could not help telling her story. San Vito was very lonely without Marotz. The old Duke was rather cross, and Onofria more and more plaintive. Zia had grown more desiccated with age, and cared less and less for anything but her money. This Lucia did not really say, but her picture was not to be mistaken. Hals would not say how he missed Marotz, but there was something gone out of his life which he could not replace, or do without. He was, his wife said, more amusing than ever, but he seemed to have less than ever to do. Lucia could not be everything to him as she wished to be. This also

she did not express in any phrase, nevertheless Marotz read it. What she did say was that both Hals and she had been more glad than surprised to understand how happy Marotz was.

Hals declared he should found an order himself, and would insist on San Vito's taking the veil. Onofria and herself were to go to the Reparation and help Marotz to worship Poor Sister.

"So you will perceive," she wrote, "that he is jealous, and is determined to make Nonna and me jealous too. But we refuse. Don Ercole came to supper last night and his teeth fell out, but Sinibaldo brought them to him on a salver. Your father said it was much worse than San Gianbattista's head on the charger, in the sacristy. The only person here who is more jealous of Poor Sister than your father is the Prioress, who is never tired of assuring me that the Reparation vows are not 'solemn.' Old Maso died last week, and his wife is heart-broken. He was nearly a hundred, and they say he had saved ever so much money. Certainly he never wasted any on soap. He would not go to bed, but sat on the doorstep all day, and pretended to be asleep whenever Don Ercole went to see him. One day your father went, and he opened one eye and squeaked out, 'Where is Donna Maria-Assunta?' Your father told him again though he knew perfectly well where you were, and Maso made a crackle in his throat and said, 'There is then no door into heaven from Sicily.' His wife came out and told Hals how he pretended to be asleep when Don Ercole tried to make him go to confession. 'I 've forgotten what I have done wrong,' Maso declared. 'Perhaps Gesu Cristo has forgotten

too; what's the good of reminding Him?' Presently he asked your father if it was true that every one has an angel-guardian. 'Mine,' he said, 'will be glad when I am dead. He must be tired of San Vito. He ought to know how to mend shoes by now; he has had nothing to do but watch me for eighty years.' 'Perhaps,' your father suggested, 'your angel is rather ashamed when you shut your eyes all the time Don Ercole speaks to you. Una mancanza di educazione, quella!' 'Cobblers have not fine manners,' retorted Maso; 'he must be a stupid angel not to know that.' I am afraid your father laughed, but Maso's wife wept bitterly. 'It is a scandal,' she wailed; 'in my family they do not die without the sacraments.' 'In *her* family some will not die at all,' snarled her husband. Considering that he is ten years older than his wife this was rather unfair. Next he asked your father if Elias was rich, and your father said he fancied rather the contrary. 'Then,' said Maso, 'he must have been extravagant. He *drove* to heaven with four horses; for me, I shall have to walk.' He was thinking of the paintings of the four prophets under the dome in the church. 'In the last *predica* of a mission,' he said, 'I once heard a Passionista tell that in heaven the streets are paved with gold. If Don Ercole knew that, he would wish to die himself, instead of persuading me that I ought not to mind. He could soon grow rich then—with a little pick-axe.' Your father laughed again, but tried to make the old man see what the monk had meant. But Maso got very angry. 'That is how we are deceived,' he snapped out; 'because we are ignorant and cannot help

ourselves. I might have given away all the poor *soldi* I have earned to build a church, thinking to get gold instead when I got to heaven.' I am sure your father tried to teach him how much better it would be if he had, but he will not admit that he did. 'Maso is Maso,' he declares, 'and God must understand him better than I can. His mind is all crumpled up and greasy, like his hard old leather apron. I can't uncrumple it, or make it clean.'"

In this saying Marotz recognised a flash of likeness to Poor Sister, though in most things the nun and her father were singularly different. Hals generally seemed to have something of Charles II's feeling that men were mostly scamps, but thought no worse of them for it. Poor Sister held to the comparative rarity of scamps. "The good in people," she insisted, "is as genuine as the bad. Inconsistency or incompleteness is not hypocrisy."

Marotz went back to her long letter.

"Maso assured your father that the reason he had lived so long was because he had not been good enough to make any one want him in heaven. Whereupon his wife, who must have heard this sentiment before, and recognised it somehow by his lips, whimpered out that he might be wanted elsewhere. Maso roundly asserted that this was nonsense. 'It is the good people the devil would like to catch,' he said. 'He must be tired of bad people. Hell is full of *cattiva gente*,' he explained, 'and the devil must be tired of their ways.' Next day I went also to see him, but he will never talk to me as he does to your father. The only difference between women, he told him once, is that some are deaf and some are not.

He liked you, in his way, but is cross with you now for going away from San Vito. He spoke of that even to me. 'Her Excellency,' he said, 'was impatient to get to heaven; it is a mistake; we all belong to her here. There she will be nobody. *Ecco!*' You can see for yourself how cross he is. That evening your maid Ancilla, who, you remember, is his brother's granddaughter, went down to him, and he asked her questions about you, but he scolded her for not having become a nun instead of you. 'If Gesu Cristo wanted a nun from the castello, *you* could have gone,' he snapped; 'one looks just like another in their habit.' Still he refused to go inside, and sat on the top step just outside his door. He was evidently dying, and grew grey, like a wood-ash fire that is going out. But he crouched in his hard, black chair, and peered down the street now and then, and then shut his eyes up tightly. His hands grew still at last; before they had been plucking restlessly. Ancilla looked close, and saw that he was actually dead. There was Benediction at the convent, and just then the bell rang. Almost without thinking she knelt down. When she got up again Maso's head lay back against the chair; his hands were quite cold, and she touched his face, which was cold too. She did not doubt that he was really dead, and she called quietly to his wife, who was inside. Don Ercole, attended by the confraternity, came up the street carrying the Blessed Sacrament¹ to a *moribondo* higher up the hill. The *assistenti* were singing the *O Salutaris*, and one of them tinkled the bell. Maso sat

¹The intelligent reader will understand that Don Ercole was not chaplain of the convent, but *parrocho*.

quite up and stretched his hands out, both eyes wide open, 'I was always ignorant,' he said. 'That was my way. His Majesty . . . will excuse it.' Ancilla said it was the first time she had ever heard him speak civilly. As our Lord came by he sank back, and, as Ancilla says, died again."

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

OF this letter Marotz did not speak to Poor Sister. It was, of course, not the first she had received from home, by many. Her mother had written regularly, Onofria two or three times; her father detested writing letters, but she had had more than one from him. And even Zia and San Vito had each written once.

These last two had not been at all reticent as to their feelings: her grandfather (hoping that the Superioress would read what he wrote) had denounced all convents, and especially that of the Reparation. He attributed the most worldly motives to the "Order" for its supposed eagerness to catch the heiress, and warned them that none of his money should go to enrich their silly convent. Marotz should certainly succeed, nun or no nun, but only on condition "that she did no good" with her money! He, indeed, did himself injustice, for he was so anxious to let her know he was angry that he contrived to hide from her how sad and sore he was.

Zia wrote on thin yellow paper that she must have had by her thirty years, and really had some satisfaction in using it, especially as she enclosed her letter in San Vito's and paid no postage. It was, she avowed, entirely due to Lucia's having married Hals that Marotz should have taken this

insane notion of being a nun into her head. Not that Hals was devout, but he was just as foolish as if he were. It was probably through his English mother, "for every one knows they are *all* mad, those. What," demanded Zia, "was the use of my giving you so many handsome presents, all jewels, if you were going to become an Austrian nun? *Per carità*. . . . Nonno is so savage these days, that when he shouts at your father or Sinibaldo your grandmother nearly tumbles down her own throat. She used to like going to the convent to see Prioressa, but now she dare n't go, lest San Vito should ask her where she has been, for it would seem like encouraging you in your maggot. Don Ercole, even, is rather frightened of San Vito now; for when he was so uneducated as to ask how you were, one night he came to supper, Nonno shouted out, 'Dead, by now, most likely, with all this foolery!' It is a pity you are giving so much trouble, and it makes me bilious, so that Don Antonio says I had better not eat any macaroni at present. His daughter Ruggiera is going to be married to a *fattore* at Randazzo, but he is very cross at the dowry the man insists on. Onofria says with those teeth it's a wonder he does n't ask for more. Your grandfather won't let Ancilla be sent away, though I have told him how foolish it is to go on paying her wages for nothing. He shouted at *me* then, and said something else *basso voce*, but I do not swallow myself when people shout at me; and, if he says uneducated things, which make your father laugh between his hand and his beard, I blame *you*, not San Vito. Prioressa has been also very bilious, Don Antonio

tells me, but she says, 'Castigat quem amat, Deus.' He says it is not that; 'quem' is a masculine, and it doesn't apply to ladies. But the olives have done wonderfully this year, and Prioressa has been eating too much salad. Onofria heard him, and she fears he has not much religion. It is a pity that a good doctor is never *divoto*. Peppino at the albergo Trinacria has a goat that has had a kid with three legs; your father says that it is like Patriarca Jacopo, but he talks always *stupidaggini*, for I asked Don Ercole, and he says Jacopo had only two legs, even in his English Bible."

Onofria's letters were different. She was obviously very mindful of their destination, and painfully anxious to suit her conversation to her company. There was an official piety about them that rendered them peculiar, and not much like their writer. Her endeavour to submit to the will of God was elaborate, and persistent. One could see how much she had to put up with personally on account of it. There was a Job-like "Miseremini mei, miseremini mei, saltem vos amici mei, quia manus Domini tetigit me."

Nevertheless, she was honestly desirous to show that, much as she deplored, she could not blame the girl's determination, if it was really an obedience to the unfortunate decrees of Heaven. Onofria had quite enough enlightenment to perceive that the Spirit breatheth where it listeth, and that one can no more dictate whither it shall penetrate than know whence it cometh. Terribly aware of the inconvenience of this particular dispensation, she was none the less able to admit that there might be

no resisting it. And Onofria was a pious woman, who, deep in her heart, felt a half-uneasy suspicion that there might be a special, though unwelcome, appropriateness in the sacrifice Marotz was making of herself, a sacrifice in which the whole Casa San Vito must bear its share. Should God suffer only evil at the hands of their house? Had he not a right to claim Marotz out of it, thus, in reparation of the brother, and uncle, and great-uncle who had so outraged Him and it? Even if the Casa San Vito should, by this renunciation of hers, be brought to an end, Onofria was noble enough to see that the house might be extinguished in worse ways. She had a genuine, though timorous, faith; and, in spite of her husband's shoutings, could not believe that real harm could come of simply doing what God demanded. Only she wished He would not demand it! She did not dare, she thought, to pray that He might *not* demand it; but in truth her whole life in those days was nothing else than a piteous prayer to that effect.

In one of her letters she drew a picture of Hals, as he happened to be just then, for it was his character to be inconstantly changing, that Marotz recognised at once as a true, though thinly painted, portrait. Since he and Lucia had returned to San Vito he had not, Onofria said, been so fond of thinking about his pagans. He had suddenly been studying old mediæval legends of saints and mystics. Not saints one could understand, like San Carlo Borromeo (whose nose, he declared, got on his nerves), or San Filippo Neri, or San Francesco Salesio, but a sort of queer vagabond knights, half saints, half Trovatori,

who went pilgrimage on spirited horses, and searched all over the world for the Santissimo Calice in which Our Lord had consecrated the first Eucharist. "I am sure," wrote Onofria, "he would have gone himself, if he had happened to take it into his head, and had lived in those days. He would very likely have made Lucia go too! He described one young knight who did find the Santissimo Calice, and described it to Lucia and me as if he had gone with him, and his eyes shone like clouds that the sun lights. This wandering knight-saint was young, and as sinless as San Giovanni Evangelista, and your father made one *see* him, as the cup came into his hands, dazzling down a shaft of gold sunlight. And yet your father does not often go to pray to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and scarcely ever follows in a procession, even at Corpus Christi. I tried afterwards to tell it all again to Zia, and especially how the chalice came to the sister of one knight, who was a nun. That knight was not much like a saint, but exactly like a gentleman, your father himself, I thought. But it was wonderful to hear him describe the nun in her cloister and how the cup came to her, only it was you, Marotz, your poor father was making a picture of all the time. This I tried to do too, but you know how deaf Zia is now, and I had to scream it all out so loud it did not sound like Hals's way of telling it a bit. And Zia would not understand, but said: 'So *they*'re going off too, are they? No wonder Marotz has maggots, with parents like those.' She declares that if your grandfather had not married me, and Lucia had not married Hals, you would not be like what you are. 'Her

maggots are not *our* maggots,' she said; 'the San Vito don't go mad.' What made her *arrabiata* with your mother, too, was this: I told her it was strange your father should be all taken up with this story of the quest of the Santissimo Calice, when he seldom cared to go to Holy Communion, and how I had said so to Lucia, adding, 'If It were on earth still he would go after it,' when Lucia said, 'Ah! I wish he would.' So Zia declares they are one as bad as the other."

CHAPTER II

THE call of home to Marotz was very strong, appealing almost irresistibly to her heart, but not irresistibly to her mind. For she was able to see that all this was due, not to her having left them, but to her having left them to enter religion. Had she decided to get married no one would have complained, and there would have been no grievance, though she would have left home just the same. Her grandfather, of course, she duly remembered, would in that case have not had the same grounds of regret; but it was of her father and mother she thought with the most intense sympathy, for their sorrow was a deep and human pain of loss; San Vito's was more social and artificial. In his case, it seemed to Marotz that there was chiefly a mere natural displeasure at the frustration of plans that no human being has any right to make unconditionally, seeing that the freedom of another person is involved in them. If she herself really had a vocation to this life of the cloister, fully recognised as the highest by the religion in which they had brought her up, and to which they all themselves belonged, had any of them the right to demand that she should turn away from it, because it happened to be incompatible with certain long-cherished dreams of their own? Marotz was too sane to be blinded, by mere sympathy,

to rights which in the particular case chanced to be her own. That such a thing as religious vocation exists has always been perceived in the Catholic Church, of which they and she were members; if she had it, must she not obey it because, as it happened, she was of high rank and large fortune, and perhaps destined to be the final representative of a noble house?

But had she this vocation?

Her grandfather and Zia wrote as if she were already a nun; Onofria almost did the same. Whereas Marotz knew she was not a nun, and had herself never taken for granted that she would become one. Latterly she had doubted more and more if she would, for less and less had she perceived in herself any certainty that God called her to serve Him in this way.

There had certainly been no disappointment. She had found the life at least all that it had seemed, and in spite of the terrible burden of desolation of spirit, which had continued for many weeks now, she knew that she had been happy. It seems impossible that this could have been the case, seeing that the cross of which mention has just been made was so indescribably bitter. Nevertheless Marotz recognized that it was so, and had not perhaps the same notions of happiness that are common. Pleasure and happiness are synonymous terms to the vulgar, though one need not be a mystic to know that they who secure most pleasure are often the least happy. Nor is mere satisfaction happiness: a certain unenterprising satisfaction is frequently enjoyed by those who have scarcely learned what it means to

be truly happy. Whereas an impregnable happiness is granted to many a great soul in the midst of sufferings that merely appal those who would be too cowardly to sustain them. The martyrs, for instance, were lifted, even in life, to a glory of happiness that their tormentors might well both recognise and envy. For my part, I believe they did both recognise and envy it, and many a Cæsar must have frowned into the arena with eyes that envied what they could never comprehend.

Marotz knew that the martyrdom of some of God's servants had been almost life-long: and she had bravery enough to face that; had she felt certain of her vocation, she would not have hesitated to become a contemplative nun, even if she could have foreknown that all the years remaining to her were to be nailed to that agonising cross of dryness of spirit from which Saint Theresa, for instance, suffered long, long years.

"Poor Sister," she asked one day, "can one be *certain* one has a vocation?"

"You mean a vocation to this life of contemplative religion? Every one has a vocation. Some have a vocation to be shoemakers, and some have n't; that's why some people's shoes fit so badly perhaps."

Marotz laughed.

"In some cases. But shoes pinch occasionally because the shoemakers' patients are vain."

Poor Sister admitted the justice of this correction, and added,

"To some is given the vocation to be authors, though this is much rarer than is commonly supposed."

"So I should suppose. But now answer my question. Can one be certain that one is called to this life?"

"One can be certain that one believes oneself to be."

Marotz paused, and then said quietly, "I am not certain that I do believe it."

Poor Sister did not seem surprised; in fact she was not. Unlike numbers of good people she had not the habit of trying to force God's hand. So she had altogether stood apart from interference, from the first day Marotz had come there and said she wished to enter the Reparation as a postulant. She had never allowed herself to desire that the girl would stay, and had certainly loved her too well to desire that she should go.

Neither had she watched too closely. To her it would have seemed like eaves-dropping to have spied curiously on God's dealings with another soul. Aloof she could not hold: her nature was too tender, too sympathetic.

"Poor Sister! I have waited to see if I could be certain. I have been here four months now."

"On the other hand, you mean that you are not certain you should *not* stay?"

"If I had become a nun here, and then begun to wonder if I was certain that I ought to be one, that would not seem to me any excuse for going away. But I am not a nun, and I get no nearer feeling certain that God has really called me to it. If, on the other hand, I am merely not certain that God does *not* call me here, is that a sufficient excuse for staying?"

Poor Sister understood.

"Legally speaking—talking as lawyers talk—the life here is not in possession; you mean that?"

Marotz nodded.

"I think that is just."

Marotz paused again, and then said:

"I think it is almost certain that I shall not stay. I will wait a few weeks more; unless during that time I am *convinced* that I ought to become a nun, I will go home."

Poor Sister felt certain that she would go: but even that she would not say.

"Marotzchen, if you go, do not allow yourself to have any sense of failure. Do not for one moment let the wretched notion assail you that you are turning away from God, in the very least degree. Saint Francis of Sales tells us we often are obliged to leave God for God. Nor must you let yourself think that it is sinking to a less perfect degree of His service."

"Contemplative religion is the highest way of serving God."

"Contemplative religion is the loftiest height towards heaven in one region. But there are many regions. It is higher to be the Pope, God's vicegerent on earth, than to be a Benedictine monk."

Marotz laughed gently.

"But you don't advise me to be an anti-pope."

Poor Sister laughed too.

"Not at all. It's the sort of thing you might have done, had you lived in the middle ages, and gone a little crazy. . . . Meanwhile, remember that all these comparisons as to which way of serving

God is highest, are not at all practical. There are diversities of gifts, as there are diversities of spirits, but the same Lord worketh all in all. The top of the Matterhorn is of course nearer the heavens than the fields around Zermatt; but God made one just as much as the other. If He had wanted the fields to be all Matterhorns, He would have pushed them up."

"It is good for the cows that there are the fields," said Marotz, "but it is better for men's souls to see a Matterhorn towering above them."

"Oh, yes. Only the fields are not to admire the Alps so much as to forget that God thought the valleys also worth making."

CHAPTER III

WHEN Marotz had this conversation with Poor Sister the intolerable oppression of spirit, known to the Christian mystic as desolation, had been lifted away from her. Until it was she had determined not to speak. Whatever happened, she would not fly away from a cross because it hurt her. She would not lay herself open to future self-upbraidings that she had turned away from the cloister because she had been called upon to bear a hard burden there.

Besides the daily chapter of faults, of which mention was made long ago, there was an occasional chapter of the institute to which Marotz, as a postulant, was not called. At this meeting of the little community Poor Sister presently informed the nuns that it was not likely their postulant would remain. In ordinary course she would have been clothed, as a novice, at the end of six months. In the Reparation the novitiate lasted two years and a half, profession taking place at the completion of three years from entrance into the house. Even then the vows were not "solemn," as Prioressa had been so anxious to point out. They were "simple" vows, and could be dispensed by the Bishop of the diocese in the case that any professed sister desired to leave the Congregation. No such case had yet occurred.

Of course the nuns were all sorry to hear that

Marotz would probably leave them: how could they help it? There were but a dozen of them, and her coming had brought another ray of youthful light into the cool shadows of their cloister. They had all grown fond of her, and it must not be supposed that her talks with Poor Sister, meagrely reported here, were all the intimate conversation Marotz had had during her stay among them. There was not one of them with whom she had not talked often; but some of these discussions would have struck the patient reader as too mystic, too technical. The soldier on active service cannot help talking chiefly of the campaign, and the contemplative Religious must needs speak of the mysteries of the spiritual life. But to those who are not specialists special discourse is merely dry, and scarcely seems spontaneous.

The Sisters of the Reparation were human beings, though their life was a lofty sublimation of the human life commonly perceived, and they knew they should "miss their little postulant," just as any other twelve women, of generous sympathy, would miss one who had been with them for many months.

And they were ambitious for their institute; it was of such material as Marotz that they wished to see its newest turrets built.

To the reader it is scarcely likely that Marotz should have appeared very interesting. Her nature was deep and self-contained, her character was slowly forming itself in silence, without giving much sign. It was not easy to her to reveal herself, and it was repugnant; there was nothing in her that lent itself to intimacy. How then can it be hoped that the reader will have felt any intimacy with her? There

are some people who pass through life as strangers and are looked on mostly coldly. Perhaps this was to be so with Marotz, though to her, her fellow-creatures were sacred.

In such a place as the Reparation Marotz was, however, not misappreciated. To the noble the noble are revealed, and there was not one of them that did not discern a great soul behind the restrained, almost shy, exterior. Had God called her to their life, in her hands it would have become, they thought, as great as it can be made. But, one and all, they admitted unhesitatingly the genuineness of her uncertainty that she was in fact so called.

On the day following the chapter of the institute at which they had learned that she was to leave them, Marotz found herself at recreation walking with two sisters, Christina and Mathilde.

"I hope, Marotzchen," said the latter, "that if you go back to the world, as they call it, you will not try to be a nun all the same. You have been happy here, and have found this life a help here. But do not try to take it all away with you. A nun in domestic life is very trying to her family."

They all three laughed, and Marotz promised she would leave her cloak and hood behind her.

"Oh, no! you may take them. You need never mind remembering that you have been our little postulant. Let it be like a long retreat that you have made. But the life of the cloister is only convenient in the cloister. Some good girls try and lead it at home, and it is very tiresome for their mothers and sisters to be treated as lay-sisters."

"On the other hand," declared Sister Christina,

"there is no necessity for you to be specially worldly because you have found that you have not a vocation to contemplative religion. That is quite as common with girls who have been to a convent, as postulants, and left it. They were very good Christians before putting on the postulant's veil, and practised their religion like devout people; afterwards they revenge themselves by becoming lax Catholics."

"It's rather hard, Marotz, isn't it," laughed Sister Mathilde, "that you can't go away without so much good advice being crammed into your hands? I am as sorry for you as for people who go on a journey, whose friends see them off and insist on bestowing big nose-gays."

"You know, dear Marotzchen," said Sister Christina presently, "that you are sure to miss us, and this little convent, and the life here too—just as we shall miss you. Do not let that sense of natural regret ever tease you into fancying that you were wrong to go."

"Now," laughed Mathilde, "you are providing her with fears for her journey. Like the other kind friends who call out as the train starts, 'Be sure to change at Blank—enberg,' and 'Mind you *don't* change at Dash—heim!'"

They were cheerful people, and laughed obligingly at one another's easy jokes.

Sister Christina was young, and had still a good deal of what is called in the new English "personal beauty," to distinguish it, no doubt, from the costlier good looks that are due to the milliner, the complexion-monger, and the jeweller.

Mathilde was an old woman, but retained still

the smooth, youthful skin one sees so often in nuns. Time had bent over her long, but had scratched no lines, and written only "Peace." Christ wrote only on the ground, and in the dust, that the wind should carry His words to heaven, as if He willed that no record of that sin should be read, even of its forgiveness.

CHAPTER IV

"WHAT did I always say?" cried San Vito, with an effrontery that made Hals blush. "I knew she would soon come back."

Zia, Marotz, Onofria, and Lucia had just left the room.

"And I," said Hals, "knew that she never would come back."

His eyes were turned towards the door through which the girl had passed out last, turning, as she went, to throw back a smile at him.

San Vito glanced swiftly at his son-in-law, and said sharply:

"Of course, after six months' absence, at her age, there must be a change. She would have changed had she stopped at home, but it would have been from day to day, and you would not have noticed it."

Her father did not contradict him.

"She was a child when you took her away," her grandfather continued (and Hals understood that all which had followed his taking her away was imputed to him for unrighteousness), "and she has come back a very beautiful girl."

Hals knew she had not been a child, but still he let that pass also.

"She will never be a child again," he said quietly.

"No, no. Of course not," San Vito agreed impatiently. "Kittens become cats."

Hals laughed.

"She will never be a cat! You might have said 'eggs become eagles' and been as near the mark."

San Vito could never understand his son-in-law. As to that he had made up his mind years ago. At present he thought him less comprehensible than ever. Marotz had come home, and the Casa San Vito had recovered its jewel. Why was not her father in high spirits? While Marotz had been away he had been for ever making jokes. Let him make jokes now, and he, San Vito, would laugh at them. Before, he had not chosen to be fooled out of his ill-temper. Onofria had also failed ever to understand her daughter's husband. But she had always liked him better than San Vito, in spite of his puzzling religious laxities, which her husband did not mind a bit. And just now Onofria was more troubled by her husband himself. Ever since it had been known that Marotz was to return, San Vito had bragged of it as of a triumph of his own, as if he had dexterously managed to outwit the schemings of heaven.

Zia's attitude was that by-gones should be by-gones; but she certainly held Marotz as a fortunately repentant culprit, now magnanimously restored to favour and confidence.

Hals had not said untruly that he had always known Marotz could never come back. And Lucia found that he was right. Every day that passed showed her new glimpses of a girl who was different from the girl who had gone away in the early spring.

To Marotz herself it seemed, at first, that San Vito and every one in it was changed. Then she recognised that the change was in herself: in the eyes which saw and the mind that received what the eyes had seen.

The life was narrower, more confined, emptier and more insignificant than she had ever perceived before; much narrower than the convent life, much more confined than it; the convent life had soon revealed itself to her as, in fact, broad, full, *unlimited*, and strongly significant. Populous as San Vito was, compared with the Reparation, Marotz was in danger of being lonely there.

To each of her parents she was the second object in their life: but each of them stood first to the other. There had been no counting of places at the Reparation, and Marotz did not willingly let herself do it here at home. Nevertheless she knew that there was something she missed.

She had always been spoiled by her grandfather, and he was determined to spoil her more than ever now. Indeed she loved him, as she loved them all, even Zia. Old Sinibaldo knew that she loved him, old Maso had known it, though he had clicked his lizard eyes at her. But, alas, she could not see her grandfather quite as he had been before she ever went away from San Vito. There had been no one to compare him with then: all those of his age whom she had known were his own people, his dependants. Had he really grown coarser, louder than he used to be; was he more domineering, less considerate of others? Was it only that, before the months at the convent, in those briefer months in Rome, and Flor-

ence, and at Vienna, she had met other girls' grandfathers, and other nobles of his age and rank? Had San Vito really taken to snubbing Onofria, and saying rude things of Zia "*basso voce*," as the old woman had called it, and scolding Lucia and sneering at her father? Was it all her own morbid fancy and some new horrid readiness of her own to perceive faults?

She would go and see Concetta, old Maso's widow. Hals and Lucia were somewhere together talking about herself, San Vito was riding about the estate hectoring the *agente*, Zia in her own two rooms was making withered love to her money, Onofria had slipped away to the convent, where Marotz herself had been yesterday, and was even now gossiping with Prioressa, a pleasure she once more felt free to enjoy without fear or scruple.

Concetta was sitting on the door-step where it had always rather annoyed her that the vanished Maso would sit. All his doings had become canons of perfection now. For sixty or seventy years his penuriousness had been her endless complaint, now she grudged spending a *soldo* of his miserly savings.

"Ancilla tells me," she informed Marotz, "that I ought to give Don Ercole some money to say Masses for Maso's soul. But, Eccellenza, how can I do what he would not like with his poor *soldi*? He would rather wait where he is. He was never in a hurry. He told me I was to marry him; and my *genitori* were willing; but he did not take me for five years. That was his way."

Marotz let her be, and praised the old man as much as Concetta wanted.

"But, Eccellenza, he was not ignorant, though

he said so. When the *Santissimo* was coming up the street, and he had been dead, he turned back on his way to where God is, to say that. But it was not just. Maso was not ignorant. Only he knew things in his way. His way was different. He would not kiss, but his pinches meant the same thing. He had his way."

Marotz assured her that this was well understood.

"And Gesu Cristo understood it too. Must it not be so, Eccellenza? Maso did no *sporchezza*. He was a good man. He would say I was a *brutta bestia*, but he never looked at other women. Me only he pinched, for I was his wife. And when, twenty years ago, I dyed black the clothes I was married in, to wear at his funeral, he laughed for joy, and gave me two *soldi* for a glass of wine to drink his health in. Maso told no lies and put only leather in the shoes; God notices these things."

Marotz agreed and praised the old man more, till Concetta was more and more consoled.

"I should like," whimpered the old woman, "to get Masses said for him. But it would annoy him. And he would certainly find out. He always found out everything. When he shut his eyes he could see everything. And his eyes are kept shut altogether now."

"Dear Concetta, I will have the Masses said for him. He would not mind me. He always let me do what I liked. Once he let me try to mend a shoe. Do you not remember? And indeed I have had Masses said for him already. But I will have more."

The old woman was eagerly grateful, and fell

to laughing "in her way" at the remembrance of Marotz when she was a little girl mending the shoe.

"It was Don Antonio's shoe," she cackled; "and your Excellency made a nail in it. But Maso would not take it out. 'It will prick Don Antonio,' he said, 'and he will think it is *podagra*. Most of his *podagra* comes from the San Vito. It is too much honour for him to have this little gout in his foot from her Excellency's nail. I will leave it.'"

Marotz laughed too, and presently told Concetta she should go herself at once to the Campo Santo to put flowers on Maso's grave.

"Donna Maria-Assunta, I am grown too old to walk and I cannot go to the Campo Santo, I. Will your Excellency come here first with the flowers? and I will kiss them, and that is all I can do for my good man. I am a deaf old woman and could not hear if he wanted anything, where he is, and he called out for it. But he never did want anything, only an old shoe, and his tools, and some bits of leather. And, Eccellenza, I did put them all in his coffin. No one knows. I would have put his money too: that was all he liked, except the work. But I did not dare. He would have been so angry."

CHAPTER V

ON her way back to the palazzo, for it was in reality more commonly so called than castello, the latter term being commonly used of the *paese di San Vito* in general, Marotz overtook Don Ercole. It was before her birth that the reader last beheld him, but he was not much altered. Mentally he had, perhaps, contracted a little, and physically he had expanded a little. He had rather less hair on his head and rather more on his chin, for he found it more tedious to shave; moreover he walked with two thick sticks, and wore felt shoes with leather soles. He was somewhat more slovenly in his dress, and looked poorer, though he was in fact considerably richer. He thought more and more of this agreeable circumstance, and was less and less concerned to display any evidence of it. It was odd how, as old age drew on, he grew more impervious to any thought of what should follow it. As he limped up the steep streets of San Vito, or sat reading his "office" in the raw green sitting-room, his subconsciousness was always of his money, and it was beset by no misgiving. This serene sense of increasing possession pervaded his existence and provided it with its nearest substitute for happiness. He never ceased to bask in the comfortable warmth of his affluence—that is, of his knowledge of it, for he owed no other com-

fort to it. His manner of living was as plain as ever; in nothing did he indulge himself now, any more than in the far-away days before he began to save. Miserliness is often contagious, and his crabbed old housekeeper, Giuseppa, had grown stingier, on his behalf and her own, year by year. To save a few *scudi* for him (both he and she still spoke of *scudi*) she would have willingly starved him, though she had no more idea than he had of what good the money was to be to him.

Ordinary sane people think of money only as a purchasing medium, and take it for granted that everybody else who wants it, wants it for some particular desired object.

Giuseppa had no such notion. Money, she considered, is excellent in itself, and for its own intrinsic goodness was desired by her master. Any conscious hope that he might leave some tithing of it to herself really never came into what the poverty of human language obliges me to call her mind. Zia and Maso too, each in their own way, loved money disinterestedly, for itself, without any base, unfriendly ideas of making merely use of it. But this common characteristic, dominant as it was, had never created the least resemblance between the cobbler, the priest, and the countess, or created any ground of sympathy between the first two who often met, or the last two who were frequently in company at San Vito's table.

Don Ercole was not troubled by the remembrance that his money and he must soon be parted by the inexorable rising of death's chill river; he had no such cold recollection. For fifty years and more he had been baptising people and burying them, and

the one ceremony was as remote as the other from himself. No doubt he had been baptized, and would himself be buried, but he could no more foresee the burying than he could remember the baptising. A petrifying sense of survival was all that grew to him out of the successive deaths, in half a century, of his parishioners.

"Don Ercole," said Marotz, "I have been to see old Concetta."

"*Poverina!*"

Don Ercole knew the recognised phrases for use on occasions of congratulation, condolence, or commiseration, and employed them with a frugal economy of expression. They were like artificial flowers, which can be used continually.

"She is utterly desolate. It is extraordinary how she misses Maso."

"*Gia! gia!* she is *sciocca!*" declared the priest, with the air of agreeing with what Marotz had just said.

He was going to the castello and hobbled on, Marotz walking slowly at his side. He was wondering when she would get married. They ought to take her to Palermo: here, in the mountains, there was no one, unless Mongibello should throw up some one out of the bowels of the earth!

Marotz was very beautiful, and even Don Ercole could perceive this. Nor did he object to it in her, it was not out of place.

He had nothing to say, so he said it. Words had never been of much use to him, so he used them sparingly. He used everything sparingly: things which were useful because it was stupid to waste

them, and things which were not because there was no object in using them at all.

At the palazzo Marotz left him. Sinibaldo said the Duke had just come in, and she herself went to get the flowers for Maso's grave. She picked an armful of the best that could be found. Out of the window her grandfather saw her and called out to her. He came down the worn marble steps into the garden and watched her as she gathered them. Don Ercole sat by the window and smoked the cigar the Duke had given him, wishing his host would come in and close it. There was a log-fire, and he saw no use in letting all the warmth escape in that senseless fashion.

"I am going to make a wreath," said Marotz, "to put on old Maso's grave. Concetta will like that."

San Vito laughed.

"Don't put them too near him, or he will wither them," he observed pleasantly.

He thought it quaint of the girl to be spending her time thus, but, so long as she would not want to be a nun, he did not mind her vagaries. She did not seem to care about clothes as her grandmother had done, and indeed did still; and her mother had always been peculiar too, though Lucia's oddities were shared, as it were, with her husband, and were always attributed to him by San Vito.

Presently he patted the girl's shoulder and went back to Don Ercole in his "studio." He was in a good humour, and repeated his cheerful joke about the flowers to his guest. Maso had refused to go to confession, and the Duke felt he was paying a sort of compliment.

Don Ercole's Christian charity was not scandalised, which is not to say that he agreed with what was implied. One joke to him was about as stupid as another, and San Vito was accustomed to say what he chose.

What had happened to Maso, Don Ercole did not inquire. He was not inquisitive and had no means of knowing. His imagination had always been lethargic, and now that Maso's name was mentioned he thought of him as an old cobbler whom he had buried rather recently, that was all. Besides, he had an indolent sense of the goodness of God: and Maso had, after all, been a Sicilian and a Catholic. Would it be worth God's while to damn him? Some difference must be observed between pig-headed cobblers and people like Garibaldi and Mazzini. No doubt Maso was in purgatory, and might for the present very well stay there.

CHAPTER VI

MAROTZ took her flowers back to Concetta, who kissed them one by one, making a remark almost with each; but what she said may here be strung together.

"Eccellenza! If the Madonna only knew how Maso could dance the Tarantella!"

Marotz insinuated that this must have been before her time:

"You see, Concetta, he was always a very old man ever since I can remember."

"Yes, yes. But he never forgot, only his bones grew stiff. If he got to heaven they would not be stiff any more."

Marotz did not think it necessary to remind her that Maso and his bones would not be together till after the day of judgment.

"If the Madonna only knew how he could dance, the Tarantella especially; for that alone would she make Gesu Cristo forgive him. It would amuse them: the saints, popes, and bishops, and nuns and so on—they were not accustomed to dancing. It would be a novelty."

The Campo Santo lies outside the *paese*, a mile or so away, on a terrace of the mountain. San Vito lies in an elbow of the twisted valley, with a view

one way towards Randazzo, looking in the other direction up a steeper gorge that climbs into the recesses of the hills. Along this gorge the narrow road leads to the Campo Santo. It is shut in by a wall, at the four corners of which are peculiar stone busts, which are surrounded by what look like huge red leaves, as if some monstrous bud were just bursting into full flower, and disclosing a human head and shoulders folded up in its petals. But these odd carvings really represent souls in purgatory, and the outer curled leaves, of a dull red-ochre colour, are intended to suggest flames.

Similar busts adorn the gate-posts; the gate itself is of ancient wrought iron, that long ago was painted black.

In the middle of the unkempt grassy space is a sort of Calvary, but the cross stands empty, the figure represented as having been taken down. At the foot, on a block of unhewn rock, sits the Madre Addolorata, with the lifeless body of her son laid across her lap.

Here Marotz laid down her flowers and knelt to pray. Then, leaving the flowers there; she went to look for Maso's grave. It would have been easy to find it, even if Concetta had not directed her. It was the only new one. Presently she went back to the Calvary and began to make her wreath.

It was late afternoon, but the sun was shining down the gorge, and at present the desolate place was bathed in rich yellow light. Soon the sun would have dipped behind the mountains.

There was absolutely not a sound except the rustling of the long windy grass upon the graves.

Marotz sat on the mound of the Pietà, and, to any one looking down from the road, she would have seemed part of the group. She had thrown her hat aside, and her dress was nearly as dark and plain as the Madonna's. Her movements were so slight that no one could have perceived them at that distance.

It was inevitable that her occupation should remind her of the afternoon, that seemed now to have receded into a distant but not dim past, when she had sat wreathing flowers into a chaplet for the unmarked grave in the green court of the Reparation Convent. Poor Sister came again to sit close beside her, and told her the story of the mound that had no cross. She thought of Poor Sister's saying that absence is a bridge along which love passes to and fro. And another saying, of her father's, came into her mind, which he had made in speaking of a glorious scene they had looked at together early last spring, at one of the Castelli Romani. "One never leaves such beauty behind," he had told her. "It remains not a memory but a possession."

Poor Sister would be always a possession. Out here, in the plain clear air, she felt that there was nothing between them, nothing to separate, only continuous space, filled by God, in whom all His creation is knit together.

The sun set, and blue shadows began at once to grow along the valley. The light wind ceased to breathe, and the long grasses had nothing more to say.

She finished her wreath and took it to the grave, and knelt to lay it there. It was hard to say anything: Maso himself had said it all.

How could she urge mercy to Mercy itself? Surely His Majesty would understand.

When she went to fetch her hat she sat down once more for a few moments; the place was immeasurably lonely, but she did not feel lonely there. How puzzled some of these poor men and women, who lay here, must have been, just as she had often been, and we all are. For there is no answer to any question worth asking, to those inevitable, old, old questions, that were so old when Job sat in his misery and asked them of his friends.

And now these simple people knew it all. No wonder they held their peace. Doubt and question are talkative, but knowledge needs not talk.

And they had loved, and lived. Here, in the folded, aloof valleys of the great hills, they had drunk of life's mystic chalices, bitter-sweet, and had been men and women, snatching their share in life's banquet, unsuspected by the wide, far-off world that had never had any meaning for them—content to laugh and weep, and pray and labour, love and be young, and outgrow youth. They had all lived.

Would she ever?

She rose and moved slowly to the gate, her eyes bent downwards, ponderingly. She heard it creak on its rusty hinges, and looked up.

Holding it open for her, with his hat in one hand, stood Rodrigo di Toledo, waiting for her.

CHAPTER VII

MAROTZ was undoubtedly surprised, and Rodrigo was able to perceive that it was so. But her surprise was not unflattering, for she had no appearance of being displeased to see him.

Was he the answer to her question?

Perhaps, if the reader shall have patience to finish this book, he will still be in doubt. To some it may appear that Rodrigo was sent by a power not malignant: pain also being a part of the Divine gift, and not the most ignoble to the noble. To others it will seem a stroke of Fate, that blindly flings her missiles into the darkness through which man stumbles to the end.

"How did you find me? Did you pass by this way—which leads nowhere—by simple accident, and see me?"

"No," he answered. "I came on purpose: to call you away from the dead, who do not need you."

His sentence left unfinished was better, he knew, than if he had provided the obvious antithesis.

They walked up the steep road together, the swift shadows dropping on them from the mountain.

"But, Don Rodrigo, how did you know where to look?"

"Well, I came to your *paese*——"

He almost paused for her to ask him why; but

she merely listened, and he went on—"and I went to the albergo. There I left my valet and my things, and set out to look for you. Of course I went towards the castello; but half-way up a street, that must be the crookedest and the steepest in Sicily, I saw a girl talking to a very old woman at a door-step. It was easy to see the girl was a servant from your house, and I asked her where you were. The old woman and she answered together that you were gone to the Campo Santo, to put flowers on the grave of the old woman's husband. 'That,' said the old woman, 'will do him good. It will show people there he is a person of consideration.' So I asked the way here, and followed you."

"My grandfather will certainly not let you stay at the albergo Trinacria," observed Marotz. She could scarcely ask him what had brought him to Sicily; she could, in fact, not pretend to wonder, for she was in no doubt.

"That," said Rodrigo, laughing, "sounds very feudal. I suppose the Duca di San Vito merely expresses a wish, and any stranger he chooses to get rid of is deported immediately."

"Oh! he will not wish to get rid of you. He is extremely hospitable. But he will have all your things brought to the palazzo, and there you will remain as long as you stay in Sicily."

"That will certainly not be disagreeable," said the young man, making, she observed, no pretence of being surprised.

"My father," Marotz added, "came to the albergo about twenty years ago, and has been at the castello ever since."

"A delightful arrangement," observed Rodrigo, and Marotz felt that her last remark was scarcely fortunate. "I only hope," said her companion, "that the Duke will be as hospitable in my case."

For a few paces they walked on in silence, then she asked if he had been long at the gate before she saw him.

"A little while. When I saw you first you were kneeling by the grave where you had laid your *corona*."

"Yes. I meant to pray for the old dead man. But I could find nothing to say that had not been better said already."

"Principessa!" he exclaimed. "You add a new terror to religion. I had no idea that in prayer originality was insisted on."

She turned her fathomless, sombre eyes upon him, smiling none the less, and he noticed how her very smile was grave, and her very gravity smiling.

"It seemed to me," she said, "that it was officious to go on begging God to do what He wants to do of His own accord."

"After all, nothing is more delightful than being entreated to do precisely what one desires to do."

Rodrigo di Toledo, as he said this, assured himself that, from the Alps to Cape Spartivento, there was not another girl outside a convent who would talk to a young layman like this. This rarity he thanked heaven for. There was probably not one singularity of this girl's that he did not dislike. Then he reminded himself, cynically, of two things: that he had come south, even of Cape Spartivento,

and that five or six weeks ago Marotz had been a nun.

He disliked this latter recollection extremely.

Half-a-year ago he had resolved to marry Marotz if she would consent. Then he had suddenly heard that she had entered a convent, and the notion had been altogether laid aside.

His aunt, the ambassadress, was away on leave, with her husband, at the time Marotz returned home, and did not quite immediately hear of it. As soon as she did, she wrote to her nephew, and said: "Princesse Marie Nostitz has got tired of her convent, and gone back to Sicily, where she is shut up in a castle, surrounded by inaccessible and savage mountains. She will have had enough of the extremes of piety for a while, and it would be a charity to give her something else to think about. At Šap Vito there can't be much. Her father and mother are too much in love to do anything but stare into one another's eyes. There is no one else but grandfathers and grandmothers, and a great-aunt of her mother's, who has grown yellow from living entirely on gold. Now do go and catch this mountain goat before some one else begins the chase. Of course they will soon bring her here to Rome, or take her to Palermo; and wherever she goes she will be a sensation. You saw for yourself how beautiful she is, and let me remind you how rich she must be. Her father was rich even when he was a younger son, and now he is the head of his family. The San Vito were always wealthy, and for a long time now they have sat among their mountains, saving money all the while. They do

nothing from year's end to year's end except get richer. No doubt she is peculiar; but I fancy she is only peculiarly good, and that will not matter. I hear of you from Sandro di Sangro, and it does not seem *you* are exactly a San Luigi Gonzaga. . . . Your mother's arrival in our family was very convenient, seeing that we had spent our last *grano*, but she is not the most imposing head, in the way of a Duchessa, that the Toledo could have, *é vero*? Now Donna Maria Assunta is not only *bellissima assai*, but as dignified as an empress, and *intelligente quasi troppo*. After all, you are ambitious and it will please you to see the Duchessa di Revigliano at the head of everything in Naples. Even here, if you bring her to Rome, there is no one finer than her, that I can see. Once again, let me warn you that it will be a mistake to think you can take your time. Don Fabio Maiori was seriously struck, one could see that without a telescope; he is clever, though less so than you are; he will be Principe di Positano, and double as rich as you will be, even when your mother dies; there is no better blood than the Maiori, and it is free from some little spots which would n't be worth remembering if only other people would forget them. He has an excellent character, and almost certainly will be an ambassador. And it appeared to me that he understood how to please that clever girl better than you did. . . ."

The ambassadress knew very well that Rodrigo did not like Fabio di Maiori, and it amused her to guess what special reasons there might be.

At the moment of receiving this letter her nephew's occupations at Naples were not precisely the pursuit

of a wife, and he did not immediately abandon them. Nevertheless he gave a rather careful consideration to the subject. He did not particularly wish to be married, but he perceived the importance of securing as the female head of his house such a duchess as Marotz would make; and, though not merely mercenary, he had no objection to becoming richer. He liked spending, and his extravagances were not all dissipated. There were lost estates of his family, the opportunity of repurchasing which happened to offer just then. He wanted to renovate the palace at Naples, and the once splendid Villa Toledo, near Massa Lubrense; he was a first-rate rider and proud of having first-rate horses. He had a genuine and keen love of art, and was a greedy collector of pictures and statues. And the social ambition his aunt had detected in him was as strong as any of these tastes.

Had he conceived it necessary that he should care for his wife he would not have desired to marry Marotz. But such an idea did not occur to him. Nor did it occur to him that marriage would necessitate much alteration of his actual mode of living. He was not at all notorious. Without elaborate secrecy he had never been ostentatious, or even imprudent in the freedom he allowed himself. His aunt's remarks about San Luigi Gonzaga did not deceive or alarm him in the least. Sandro di Sangro had told no tales, but the lively ambassadress was inquisitive, and had tried to pump him before.

CHAPTER VIII

ANCILLA had met Rodrigo's valet as well as his valet's master, and hastened to the castello with her news. Onofria had got back from the convent and hastened with it to San Vito, who did exactly as Marotz had declared he would do. When she and the young Duca arrived at the castle, his servant, who rejoiced in the classic name of Ulisse, and his *bauli* were already installed there. One of the huge, gaunt guest-chambers had been prepared, and an immense fire of blazing logs was lighting it far more effectually than the big, unbleached wax candles.

San Vito himself led his guest to this fine if austere apartment—for an apartment it was in the real, not the common, sense. There was bedroom, dressing-room, and sitting-room, all opening one from the other, and all hung with Spanish leather, gilded and painted in gorgeous arabesques. Each room had a tall, carved chimney-piece, of rich creamy marble, painted also, and plentifully gilt, but so long ago that the colours were now as mellow as where it had been left bare. The furniture was more like what one sees in a palace than what is generally considered adapted to modern ideas of easy comfort. But it was such as would have stirred the envy of a connoisseur or a collector. It all told the same story of a princely family so long accustomed to being rich

that it had forgotten it. There was no hurried ostentation of wealth, but the habitual implication of it from generation to generation. Rodrigo's tastes were as cultivated as his manners, and he appreciated the huge, fortress-like palace, and his own quarters in it. To much of the gilded youth of Naples such a place would have seemed merely chill and antiquated.

San Vito himself put on again his long-disused courtesies, and harmonised well enough with the large, if rugged, grandeur of his house.

He was, in truth, delighted to have such a guest, and only wondered why they had waited for chance to bring one.

"After all it's our fault," he said to himself. "No wonder Marotz got silly notions. She could not fall in love with her father or me. And we showed her no one else except Don Ercole!"

Zia was elated also, and dug out of one of her wardrobes a dress of a certain venerable magnificence. She had many such, and a queer old vanity to match them, which needed a youthful masculine presence to quicken it from the atrophy of disuse.

Marotz met her coming out of her room, and clapped her hands approvingly.

"*Bravissima*, Zia! You do us credit."

"It's more than you do! Go and dress better."

But this the girl refused flatly to do, and her dress was indeed finely suited to her rare, if sombre, beauty.

"You have no jewels," persisted Zia, still finding fault.

"At Vienna I wore the diamonds you gave me,

but here at home it would not fit a girl like me. But, Zia! come back, do, dear Zia, and put on some jewels yourself."

Zia bridled. And Marotz was too delighted to smile. It was a revelation to perceive this flutter of feminine complacencies beneath the yellow hide that had seemed to be a mere purse.

She really did persuade the old woman to turn back into her room and let Marotz choose some rich though antiquated gems for herself to wear.

In the salon they found Onofria, pretending not to be overjoyed at the rare excuse to be fine. At sixty a woman who has liked smart clothes all her life is apt to like them more than ever, and the poor Duchessa had had so few opportunities.

"We are all good-looking," observed Zia, looking in the glass and affecting to be looking at the others, as Lucia entered. She was in spirits, and good-humoured enough to forget that none of them were really of the San Vito except herself.

Lucia was always well-dressed; Hals was her lover still, and for his sake alone she would never have been dowdy. He came in directly after his wife, and looked at all four ladies with his odd, gentian-blue eyes, that were always observant and always seemed inattentive. At forty-three he was still young and had a young man's slim erectness, though he was too big to seem slim.

"Zia, it is very unfair," he laughed. "You don't give Marotz a chance."

The old woman chuckled and declared that no one could tell where his maggot would bite him

next. San Vito had waited outside and entered with their guest.

The Duke was also smart, or what by comparison with ordinary habit seemed so, but his magnificence was anything but "a world too wide." For time had not shrunk either his shanks or his stalwart figure. Nevertheless he was "very well," as Jane Austen would have said, and his state manners were inseparable from his state clothes.

Like Zia, he thought Marotz not fine enough, but Lucia and Hals were not of his opinion.

Rodrigo seemed handsomer here, to those who had only before seen him at Vienna. His figure was excellent, and if he was not so tall as San Vito or the Prince, he was taller than Marotz, who for a girl was tall. Good features are commoner in the South than among us, and the Duca di Revigliano was considered handsome among the Neapolitans. He was certainly intelligent, and if the complexion was perhaps too dark, the expression was significant and distinguished.

Zia approved of him, and Onofria probably liked him all the better for looking worldly, being a pious, simple creature herself. San Vito never thought about a man's good looks, and Lucia was occupied too much about Marotz to think carefully about the young man who had silently dropped into their midst to make court to her.

That he had come for no other purpose he himself made no attempt to disguise.

He had weighed it all. Young men from Naples do not turn up unexpected and uninvited among the Sicilian mountains without a reason. And

his object would, of course, be divined. Why then affect to disavow or dissimulate it? Rodrigo had no ethical dislike of dissimulation, but he perceived that it was commonly abortive, and he had no monstrous pleasure in it for its own sake.

Neither did it amuse him to cry for the moon. If Marotz was the moon he certainly would not cry for her. He was not at all in love with her, but he had made his mind up to marry her if possible. If it were not possible he could not make it so by diplomacy, so he saw no object in concealing his motive. That did not mean that he was to make an instant and fulsome parade of love-making. There was Marotz herself to gain, and no such course would, he knew, be effectual.

Nevertheless he was determined, if he could, to get what Fabio di Maiori wanted particularly.

CHAPTER IX

"It is a peculiar wooing," said Hals.

And his wife looked at him interrogatively.

"You mean his dropping down in our midst, and forcing his own opportunities!"

"Oh, no! That was sensible of him. He is evidently sensible."

"That is a good thing," observed Lucia. She did not flatter herself that all their treatment of Marotz had been remarkable in this respect.

"*Carissima!* We are no more like other people than Marotz is like us. She behaves like herself and so do we."

As Lucia understood her husband she did not find fault with the constructive incompleteness of his sentences.

"How then peculiar?"

"He has been here a fortnight now. And it is obvious that he intends to marry her, if she chooses and we do not forbid her."

"Why should we forbid her?"

Hals did not, perhaps could not, answer. So he merely went on:

"Nonno approves. And Zia is as conscious as if he had come to marry *her*. I wish he had."

"Then why?"

"Do you like him?"

Lucia really did not see why she should not, and Hals, if he might have seen, only went on with his own much-interrupted soliloquy.

"I cannot make out why he should want to marry her."

"Hals!"

"Oh, I know. She is beautiful—that is your fault! But he does not care for her beauty. He certainly would not want her if she were ordinary-looking: he is not a vulgar fortune-hunter. But he does not appreciate her great beauty though he perceives it. He has excellent taste, and it would be impossible for him not to notice so extraordinary a possession. And he is aware of her unusual personality . . . but that repels him."

Lucia did not understand, and did not pretend to.

"Her rank is a satisfaction, but not a temptation to him," Hals continued. "He has enough for his purposes. He is not a *nouveau riche*. The Toledo are as good as we are."

Lucia laughed.

"I should like Nonno to hear you say that!"

Since Marotz had been a little girl they had both used her name for their father and father-in-law.

"But he does n't. And at Naples at all events the Toledo are as good as anybody, now they have become rich again."

"Hals, do you mean that we ought to stop it?"

"Lucissima! How can we stop it? When we don't even know why we should. Marotz intends to marry him, and Nonno thinks her quite right. So does your mother, so does Zia, so does Sinibaldo;

I have not asked Ancilla, but no doubt she approves. Who are we?"

"Her father and mother!"

"By all means. But we didn't consult her before *we* married; why should she consult us?"

"And if she does?"

"You will consult me; and I shall not know what to say. I am not like Prioressa. She knows all things, like Divine Providence, and will tell you unerringly what will happen last year. I can only say when the glass goes high up that it will be fine to-morrow—or this afternoon—and then it rains."

Lucia laughed, but was, of course, not satisfied. He did not pretend to be satisfied himself.

"Marotz is a fateful sort of person," he declared, "and Fate doesn't consult me any more than the weather."

Lucia did not relish these assumptions that destiny, perhaps an unfavouring, anyway a blind and incalculable destiny, was to be a factor in her daughter's life. She thought it one of those manifestations of her lover's paganism that were lamentable. She herself was used to resigning the future to Providence, and not even to Him till all had been done to obviate accident as far as might be. But in the present case she saw nothing to arouse apprehension.

Rodrigo was a gentleman; his introduction to them had been regular and favourable. What she could see of him she would have liked if Hals had let her alone. He was plainly anxious to marry Marotz, and had, she thought, consistently and without disguise shown this desire from the first. He could have no suspicious motive in his wish, for

he was no needy adventurer, no greedy fortune-hunter. His family was ancient, distinguished, noble and of high rank. His fortune was ample, and he himself was handsome, and well-bred. She did not, perhaps, consider that of his character she knew only what he had himself chosen to show her. Situated as she was, a woman removed from the world and utterly ungiven to gossip, how could she be expected to know anything of such a young man beyond that which she supposed she had been able to observe for herself? In Vienna no one had hinted any evil against him, and Lucia was not a woman prone to imagine evil. It would have been beneath her charity and beneath her dignity.

CHAPTER X

MAROTZ had been married three months. This is not a love-story, and the reader, on whose patience so much claim has already been made, must excuse also this rapid arrival at a result with so little dwelling on the processes that conducted to it. Rodrigo had never disguised his object in coming to San Vito, and he had not been made to understand that his object was disapproved; so he pursued it attentively, carefully, and without loss of time.

He was not a dilatory man, and though his actions were seldom unconsidered, he acted as promptly as merely impulsive people are apt to do. As no one interfered to prevent them his opportunities were unusual; and he wasted none of them, though he used them in his own way. He made no parade of courtship, just as he had attempted no dissimulation of his wishes. Nor was he, as a lover, ardent. That Marotz did not know: there was no one to compare him with; and she had never amused her leisure with thinking of lovers and their ways. Rodrigo himself perceived that he was not making love ardently, but perceived also that Marotz was not aware of it; and presently he decided that there was no need to be more warm. Perhaps this strange girl would only have been repelled, almost startled, if he had assumed more warmth.

And he was glad to arrive at this conclusion, for he did not feel ardent, and the effort to seem so would have been laborious.

Rodrigo di Toledo was reticent, often to the point of secrecy, but not fond of acting a part. He thought much of his dignity and acting is so hard to combine with dignity that it is only excusable where demanded by necessity.

He was now determined that Marotz should be Duchessa di Revigliano: and when he had thus set the helm of his intentions he steered straight; but he would prefer to get what he wanted without pretending this or that.

They were married at San Vito, which Marotz wished and no one else could object to. But the Cardinal di Santa Croce came all the way from Rome to marry them. This was that Giulio di San Vito mentioned in a former chapter, who was, with another priest, the Barnabite Cesare di San Vito, the only heir of the great Sicilian family failing Marotz herself. It will, of course, be remembered that she had a father as well as a mother, a fact the old Duke seemed apt to forget, though he had often complained of it, and her name was not San Vito. Nevertheless her grandfather could make her heir of the bulk of his property, and had always intended to do so. It was convenient to make certain family arrangements now, and for that reason San Vito was not averse to his kinsman's coming with so good an ostensible pretext as the marrying of his granddaughter.

Several of the many titles in his family could not only pass through females but be held by a woman,

and some of these were now formally settled on Marotz and made over to her with the estates whence they were derived. Thus at the date of her marriage she was legally Principessa di Torre Marco, Duchessa di Fiumara, and Contessa del Ponte Rosso. As ultimate heiress of Onofria's father she would become also Princess di Montegiove, and as her grandfather's heir she would eventually be Duchessa di San Vito.

Certain estates he would leave at his own death to the Cardinal, certain others to Cesare di San Vito, supposing, which he did not really suppose at all, they were to survive himself. But he wished to arrange that all should eventually return to Marotz, a result he intended to arrive at by present money-allowances.

"Are you settling these properties on Marotz," inquired her father, "or conveying them as her dowry to her husband?"

Hals never talked business of this kind with his father-in-law, and San Vito knew he was not inquisitive.

"Well, you know what is customary. The wife's dowry practically goes into her husband's hands, and he is bound by the settlement to hand her a certain allowance."

"You know very well I should never attempt to suggest how you should deal with money that comes from you. But I will say this: As you are doing what you mention I will arrange that all I myself settle on Marotz shall be in her own hands at once. Of course her husband will be informed of its amount; it can be settled on their children;

a certain proportion can be secured to him in the event of her dying first. But the whole income must be in her hands; she will probably give him most of it. It shall, however, come in the first instance into her own pocket."

Hals, of course, was speaking of the fortune he intended at once to give his daughter on her marriage, not of what would come eventually to her after his own and Lucia's death. And the matter was arranged so, Rodrigo making no objection or expressing any surprise. As a matter of fact the fortune he was receiving with her from her grandfather was larger than he had expected. The San Vito were wealthy, but, like many rich people who were not given to lavish expenditure, had acquired a respectful reputation for closeness in money matters.

San Vito himself was in reality a generous man, but one who hated waste and ostentation, and had a keen appreciation of the real uses and value of a large fortune.

As Marotz had been quite unaccustomed to the handling of money, and would now be made mistress of a considerable income, he advised Hals to give her some counsel in reference to it, and did so in a manner so sensible and free from interference that her father acted on the advice, though he himself thought she would be more likely to be afraid of spending too much than to be in danger of extravagance.

CHAPTER XI

WITHIN a few weeks of her marriage Marotz made her appearance in the world of society at Naples, and before Lent, which fell very late that year, they went on to Rome. The San Vito and the Toledo were both of the *regno*, and were less concerned with the black and white divisions of society than those families which had been temporal as well as spiritual subjects of the Holy See; but in 1886 the Neri and Bianchi were more strongly coloured than they are now, and it was scarcely possible for people in their position to move indifferently in both circles. It was therefore in black circles, which were then by far the most distinguished, that Rodrigo and his wife were seen.

Both in Naples and Rome, Marotz at once stepped into the position that he had foreseen for her, and the Duchessa di Revigliano was instantly accorded an importance that no holder of that name had enjoyed for over a century. She had beauty, wealth, youth, and distinction. No one attempted to deny any of these to her. That she was clever was asserted by most, and suspected by those who did not mean it as praise.

Her manner was admired and almost wondered at, for it was difficult to account for in a girl of eighteen.

"She is too royal," declared some of the ill-natured, hoping there would be an echo. But there was not.

The candid bulk of society denied that she was too anything. Her dignity was peculiar in so young a girl, only just married, but it was only peculiarly striking. Even her critics did not accuse her of haughtiness, and those who were willing to admire maintained that her gravity was extremely interesting. It was not the gravity of dulness or stupidity, there was nothing flat or heavy about it: she seemed to watch life with a profound if somewhat silent interest, through her wonderful sombre eyes. Nothing, in fact, said these charitable persons, was more interesting about the Duchessa di Revigliano than her undisguised though undiscussed interest in all around her.

The reputation of her actual beauty grew daily; at first, men declared, it hardly revealed itself fully. They were not so stupid as to say it had been a bud which only presently opened into full flower, for most buds are far more beautiful than the wide-blown blossom.

Certainly Marotz was much more admired and much more talked about after she had been a month in Rome, than at the end of their first week.

It was discovered that she had no accomplishments (a love of books not so counting). She had never been heard to sing, or play upon any instrument, and she admitted frankly that she could not paint or draw. But this was not urged against her. A few middling acquirements of that sort would have been incongruous.

In Rome, however, everything is observed, and

many things were presently noticed about the Duchessa di Revigliano over and above her beauty, her jewels, her faultless dress, and her fine though peculiar manner.

First, that she was silent, but not dull; very seldom witty, but almost always interesting. The Sicilians have in Rome the reputation of being great talkers, and so have the Neapolitans, but Rodrigo di Toledo was not talkative, and his wife was much less so. Secondly, it was observed that no one tried to flirt with her: that she herself was not an easy person to tempt into that amiable triviality was not worth remarking, it was so immediately obvious.

Thirdly, that her husband did not appear to be at all in love with her, to which some very sharp-eyed critics added that he even appeared to admire her much less than did most other people. That the Duchessa di Revigliano was apparently quite unaware of either of these facts.

And finally it was noted that she was not becoming popular.

Rodrigo perceived this almost at once, but without annoyance. He wished her to be just what she immediately became, important, recognised, admired, not a mere centre of friendly popularity. That she should be generally liked was not necessary; he scarcely liked her himself. Of any ultimate loneliness that this might lead to he did not take count. He did not regret for himself, or for her, that she had not apparently made any friends.

In this matter he was himself peculiar. He disliked most men and was indifferent to almost all

whom he did not dislike. Women he liked, if they were attractive, but it was never more than a physical liking, and that he had never felt for Marotz. He had never had, and never missed the want of, a man friend; the women he addicted himself to had never been friends.

A man of cold heart and hot passions is not uncommon: Rodrigo di Toledo was more unusual, for, not only was his heart as cool as his head, but his passions, though strong, were cool also. There can be no combination deadlier.

CHAPTER XII

THEY remained in Rome just over a month, leaving a few days after the Carnival, when Lent had already begun. On the day before their departure they were received by the Pope, who had been unwell at the time of their arrival.

The Cardinal di Santa Croce had proposed it to Marotz and reverted to it again in her husband's presence a few days before Shrove Tuesday.

Marotz at once showed how much she was pleased, and Rodrigo, who did not personally care at all, knew that it was necessary. He always did necessary things and seldom stooped to the weak consolation of complaining of them. Of course people of their consequence must be presented to the Sovereign Pontiff on coming to Rome after their marriage. If they had been nobodies there would have been no such necessity.

"I am sure the Holy Father will allow you to hear his Mass and give you private audience afterwards," said the Cardinal.

"Oh! I should like that," Marotz observed eagerly, but her husband inquired coolly if that were necessary.

"Can we not have a private audience without hearing his Mass?"

("She is like a nun still," he assured himself.)

"It is not a case of necessity," the Cardinal answered, "it is a matter of privilege."

He spoke coldly and with a dignified reproof.

"Our present Holy Father grants audience very sparingly. And the privilege of hearing his Mass is accorded much more sparingly. I knew Marotz would appreciate it."

"I suppose she could not go alone?" suggested Rodrigo, who perhaps did not really suppose she could, but was annoyed because the Cardinal seemed to be scolding him.

"I should think," declared the old prince of the Church, with a flash that reminded Marotz of her grandfather, "that Marotz could do anything alone! But it would be an odd sort of presentation on one's marriage."

Rodrigo laughed.

"Of course. I will go too. But Marotz will allow me to have my coffee before we start."

Probably neither of them had expected him to go to Holy Communion at the Pope's Mass, and neither of them noticed this remark at all.

On the following morning the Cardinal's old servant brought Marotz a note from him, saying that he had last night preferred his *supplica* to the Holy Father, and that the Pope had consented immediately. The day was fixed and they were requested to drive in one of their own carriages to the Vatican, which they would enter, not by the Portone di Bronzo, but by the Cortile di San Damaso, where the Cardinal would meet them and escort them to the Pope's presence.

As they drove into this courtyard, called by some,

but incorrectly, Il Cortile degli Ambasciatori, on the Thursday morning, the Cardinal was immediately in front in the plain dark carriage used by the *porporati* since the fall of the temporal power seventeen years before. Rodrigo, who had an eye to such things, observed that the guard at the gate turned out to the Cardinal but merely looked, with an incurious attention, at their own much grander equipage. At the steps the old prince of the Church, who was thin, and almost youthful in his movements, got out of his carriage without much need of his secretary's help. The Swiss guards stood to attention, presenting arms, and Rodrigo admired their picturesqueness. He did not himself feel very picturesque in evening clothes at quarter to eight in the morning.

As they passed up the wide, shallow staircase of exquisitely clean, polished, but soft and creamy marble, towards the first landing, where another Swiss stood in rigid salute, the young man noticed everything, and, with a cool, æsthetic appreciation, admired. This feeling was much deepened as they entered the artistically splendid, but literally empty anticamera, and passed through it and the *salone verde* into the red throne-room. Here the Pope was to say Mass, and an altar had been placed under the canopy, where at other times the papal throne would stand. A *cameriere segreto* was already saying Mass, though they were not behind their time, and in the corner, to the left of the altar, at a large plain *prie-dieu* the Pope was kneeling. Near the windows noble guards in long-plumed helmets were standing; close to them was a chamberlian *di spada e cappa*, in white ruffle and black Spanish court suit, with sword and

short cloak, trunk-hose and gold collar of office. Rodrigo noticed everything, the sumptuous simplicity of the red brocaded walls, every tag and detail of uniform, even the straight, plain curtains of beautiful white silk, with their narrow border of golden yellow. Even the bent, absorbed figure in the corner, in the terribly loose cassock of white fine cloth; and Marotz noticed nothing except the bowed figure, and even that scarcely at first, till she had knelt down in the place, close to it, that they showed her.

He was so near, and yet a little in front of her, that now it was impossible to see anything else: though it seemed an intrusion to watch his prayer. She had never seen any one pray quite like that. He leant far forward, the astonishing face quite hidden as yet in the white, attenuated hands; he was entirely wrapt up in what he was doing, and he did it with ineffable groanings. It was a battle of prayer, and she thought of Jacob, and how he had wrestled like a prince with God and had prevailed. One could almost see, physically, the strong pleading of the world's cause with the world's gerent by his vice-gerent in the world.

Marotz shuddered: such a presentation of loneliness had never occurred to her. She was herself lonely; had in fact been so always to some extent, not by position but by disposition, and as her character had grown so had her solitude. Many, she knew, have been, and must always be, lonely in a crowded contact with society; some because they are outside of all society.

But here was a different, unique solitude: the

poignant loneliness of one who could have no comrade and no colleague, who stood with fullest consciousness in an office that absorbed him into it, and that is without parallel or likeness.

No one, she supposed, could look once at the Pope and ever remember him as anything else. Of course he is a man, and that must make it the more awful to be vice-God.

The humanity here was, indeed, attenuated to the utmost possibility: so that the spirit and intellect, the super-mortal, seemed scarcely to have sufficient continent to localise and restrain them to a single point of space. If an artist should wish to paint a soul without a body, seeing that he must paint something, he had better try and represent Leo XIII.

She saw a man who lived in the realisation of his superhuman office as in a sanctuary: his feet only touching the loftiest summits of time, all else above it, head and heart and purpose lifted into the realms of things eternal and things heavenly, where is neither cold nor heat, nor wind nor vapour, darkness nor cloud.

CHAPTER XIII

THE Chamberlain's Mass finished, and the Pope was vested in the familiar vestments such as every village priest would wear, with nothing of outward distinction but the white skull-cap called "*solì Deo*." He began his own Mass, wrapt as he had before been in his private prayer; he might have been unconscious that any one was present. His voice, heard by her for the first time, was like everything about him, astonishing. Coming out of a frame so frail, it was resonant and large, rich and sonorous, and might, one felt, have without effort filled the greatest church, as it had in truth filled the world. The broad and full, ample Roman accent seemed not merely to suit, but to be a part of it.

She could not help watching the wonderful face, wherein each feature seemed exaggerated—the wide, large mouth, the huge, portentous nose, the immense sweep of jaw, the still more immense forehead, and finally the enormous eyes, like black fires. Every other face she had ever seen seemed insignificant to her memory as she looked at this. And through each great feature the one dominant meaning expressed itself, of uncontrollable force.

She thought of his confinement to this one narrow plot of earth, palace and garden, and scarcely pitied it. With the whole world beneath

his feet, what could it matter on how little of it they rested?

Rodrigo had his thoughts, too, and had wondered if at night, when the great palace and museum was closed to the staring tourist, the Pope had himself carried about it by the *bussolanti*, through Rafael's *loggie* and *stanze*, through the weird, white assemblage of statues; he tried to picture the Pope eating, and recalled what he knew of his former career as Nuncio and as Governor of Benevento.

When the Pope's Mass was over a third was said, during which he made his thanksgiving. Then a chair was placed on the stop step of the altar, and he took his place in it, Rodrigo and his wife kneeling on a lower step, close in front, and the Cardinal of Santa Croce came to the Pope's side and presented them.

At first that idea of tremendous force had so impressed itself that Marotz felt a sort of shrinking from it. It was like venturing too near some subtle, but terribly effective, mechanism of unknown power.

But the moment she found herself actually at the Pope's feet, with his hands upon her head, this feeling gave way to one of peculiarly affectionate confidence. Stern as the Pope had looked, his touch was so caressing and so tender, his scrutiny so sincere and yet so gentle, that all thought of him other than as the father of God's children melted away.

As her beautiful head was bent to kiss his foot, her husband's glance turned to her for one moment and was seen by the old Cardinal and by eyes keener yet than his.

"She is always like a nun," thought Rodrigo. At

the same moment he, too, leant forward over the Pope's hand and kissed the immense ring.

To Marotz the Holy Father spoke first and spoke most. And it was of herself he talked. Then he turned the blazing furnace of his black eyes upon Rodrigo, kept silence for a few seconds, and began to talk to him also—of his ancestors.

The Duca di Revigliano could talk well, and he had three interested listeners, though one of them was not impressed by fine talking. Rodrigo was interested himself, as any intelligent man must have been by such a conversation, brief as it actually was, with such an interlocutor, in such a place, and he was strongly, if not sympathetically, impressed. He knew that he had never before talked with any one so great, and that it was immensely improbable that he should ever talk to any other person equally great again. And he never forgot that he was speaking to the spiritual sovereign of the world. True, he was not himself spiritual, or even good, neither had he that impersonal interest in religion which is frequent among thoughtful, though sceptical, people. The whole domain of spirit was a kingdom from which he drew no title, and in which he possessed no inheritance: whose language was dull in his ears, and whose interests appeared to him fantastical. But he belonged to the body of the Church, and had no idea of any but that one of which the august head was now within arm's length, talking to himself and listening attentively to what he himself was saying.

It was as natural to Rodrigo to be a Catholic as to be Duke of Revigliano, but there was nothing supernatural about it; just as he had been born a Nea-

politan, so, he would have said, had he been born a Catholic.

He was not aware of lacking any spiritual sense; he took himself for granted, and would have supposed that other men were mostly as he was. Only he was not interested in other men, and seldom thought thus about them. He reckoned with them, but did not reck of them. Without discussing the matter, however, he presumed that the Church was largely composed of persons like himself.

To some, indeed, religion was a *métier*, which he was glad it need not be in his case; though, had it been his fate, he would certainly have resolved to be a Cardinal, and he could very easily imagine himself a Pope—not indeed like this one, but a Papa Principe like Leone X°, or Paolo III°, or Giulio II°.

Probably Rodrigo di Toledo could not have imagined a world—his world of Italy—without a Church; but still less could he imagine the inner spirit behind the huge external. He had a tolerant half-liking for the Church's august body, but he had not the least idea of her divine soul.

Thus the Pope was to him a very great personage, with a greatness *unique au monde*, especially now that there were half a dozen emperors instead of only one. But Rodrigo's homage was entirely human; it did not in the least approach to worship, because to him the Sovereign Pontiff represented nothing but himself, and because the exquisite faculty of worship was absent.

To Marotz the Pope was not merely the Head of the Church, though, her conception of the Church being so much nobler, that meant for her what it

could not mean to Rodrigo; but above all he was the viceroy of this earthly part of God's dominion. And so, representing God, what he drew from her was worship, passing beyond himself to that which he figured in her eyes. The trappings of his state were the mere indications of his presence and its meaning.

CHAPTER XIV

AT Cava dei Tirreni is a villa, at that time the property of Rodrigo di Toledo, and thither he and his wife went, on leaving Rome, to visit his mother, who was staying there. It is called the Villa Monsignore, and was built by a foreign prelate whose name was unpronounceable to local tongues, and so they spoke of it by his title. It is somewhat peculiarly situated, with high mountains on almost every side, and so sheltered that in spring it is as warm as another place would be in summer.

The gardens are not large, but are singularly pleasing and entirely sequestered, though other villas and the cabins of *contadini* are really close around it. A narrow and deep gorge bounds it on three sides, at the bottom of which a *fumara* hurls itself swiftly to the sea. From the terrace one looks down this high-walled valley to the Gulf of Salerno, beyond which is the plain of Pæstum, and behind that the Calabrian Apennines.

It was now Lent, and the elder Duchessa did not mind leaving Naples for a few weeks: at Easter she would return.

She welcomed her son with a rather nervous effusion and her new daughter with a stout motherliness that was not unbecoming. She was not at all like any of the relations Marotz had already, but there was

no reason why she should be; and she was evidently friendly. Why Rodrigo should have married this Sicilian girl, rather than fifty other young ladies, the fat Duchess did not understand, but she was accustomed to not understanding things, and very much unaccustomed to questioning her son's proceedings. She herself would have preferred something different—a Neapolitan, for instance, and some one more conversational.

Her own idea of conversation was asking questions, so she had not conversed much of late years with Rodrigo, who seldom answered them. Marotz did answer a good many of them, but did not ask any in return, which gave the old Duchess the trouble of finding new subjects all the time.

No doubt the girl must be much obliged to her husband for marrying her, but she did not actually say so: and her mother-in-law decided that she was cold. This was not fortunate, as the Duchessa thought she knew that her son was warm—alas, too warm! But then, all young men were like that, or so it appeared from what she heard in Naples, and what, indeed, she had heard, much longer ago, in Rio de Janeiro.

The elderly Duchessa nevertheless was apt to be alarmed, on her son's account, for she was frightened out of her wits, herself, of going to hell, though quite unable to explain why she should; and Rodrigo did not seem to be frightened at all. This hard courage, or temerity, filled her with a sort of awful admiration; an arrant coward herself, it had a dreadful air of manliness in her eyes.

All the same she had hoped he would lay aside

these "inconveniences" on his marriage; it would be a good opportunity.

But very soon she suspected that this was not going to be the case. No doubt she had her reasons, but, as it is no part of our business to gossip with the reader, we will not enter into them.

Rodrigo evidently considered that, after more than three months of marriage, the honeymoon was long ago over; and spent most of his time at Naples, leaving the two Duchesses to entertain themselves, or each other, as they preferred. His wife, he fancied, would prefer the former, as he would have done in her place; his mother would certainly rather chatter to Marotz than not chatter to any one, though very possibly she would continue to derive more real pleasure from interminable talks about nothing with her maid. He left them to settle it between themselves.

The Brazilian Duchess was very anxious that the Sicilian should see nothing remarkable in these absences of her son, which had begun almost immediately after their arrival, and had steadily increased in frequency and duration, so that it was not uncommon now for him to telegraph that he could not catch the last train, and should remain in Naples till the following evening.

Marotz herself never remarked on them, but her mother-in-law could not refrain from doing so.

"It is very natural," she observed; "Rodrigo has *molti affari* in Naples. He cannot always be here."

It was she herself who had drawn attention to his absence; Marotz had said nothing about it. Neither did she say much in response to this explanation of her mother-in-law's; had she sought any explanation

it would not have been from her. It astonished the cowardly old woman that this silent girl did not seem in the least afraid of her husband. The Duchess Rosa had lived in awe of the former Duke and was much more frightened of his son. Rodrigo was not unkind to her, or savage; but he ignored her more coldly than his father had done, and seldom even laughed at her. If he had scolded her every morning, and kissed her a good deal every evening, to make up for it, she would have been more comfortable; as it was he only scolded her now and then, and hardly ever kissed her at all. His kisses she surmised went elsewhere.

The old Duchess was more Neapolitan than the Neapolitans, and to herself she always called Marotz "*La Siciliana*," though the girl was quite unlike what she imagined Sicilians to be, except in her dark and sombre beauty. Both these women were very dark; but it was entirely different. The unfathomable shadows of the girl's eyes were like the clear blackness of deep water that is black only from its depth; the Duchess Rosa had eyes like blots of ink, shiny and shallow, and her skin was opaque with a duskiness that was not of Europe; whereas Marotz had a complexion that was brilliantly clear.

So far as the elder Duchess could see, her son and his wife "got on" very well. He certainly never scolded her, and he talked to her a good deal when he did happen to be at home. Their mother could not generally understand what they talked about, but she supposed that was because they were clever, which she had never for a moment supposed herself to be. She was far from sure that it was becoming in a young

woman to be so clever. She shrewdly suspected that, though it made it easier for Rodrigo to converse with his wife, it did not in the least tend to make him fonder of her. One morning, indeed, a conversation between them, in her presence, ended awkwardly.

The young Duke was waiting for the carriage which should take him to the station, and his mother had announced her own intention of going somewhat later to Pompei; not the ruined city, which interested her not at all, but the *paese* where is the famous shrine and local pilgrimage of our Lady of Pompei. There was to be a Triduo, with sermons by a much-admired Frate from Avellino, and the old lady had a good deal of indolent, skin-deep devoutness. As her skin was rather thick, it may have been less shallow than appeared. Her maid, who liked the outing and was bored at the villa, was to accompany her. Would Marotz go? In an evil moment the wretched old woman remembered that the girl had been a postulant in holy religion, and half-waggishly suggested that now she was married she need not give up all her piety. Marotz, for her own reasons, winced visibly; but Rodrigo was staring angrily at his mother and did not notice it.

"Marotz," he said coldly, "has done enough religion to last her for the rest of her life. Do not remind her of the convent: it makes me blush! I am a good Catholic and do not like to think I have married a nun."

He did then look at his wife, as the old Duchess was already doing. They had never seen her blush before, and he at least could see how it hurt her. She felt it burn her eyes and she could scarcely see through them.

"Why did you marry me?" she cried, plainly involuntarily.

"I thought," he answered hardly, knowing well that he need have made no answer, "that you desired it."

CHAPTER XV

RODRIGO had gone to Naples. The old Duchess and her maid were gone to Pompei. Marotz had the villa to herself, and was sitting in the hard glory of the April afternoon in the beautiful garden looking down the valley to the sea. High up, over her head to the right, towered Finestra; at her feet the gorge boomed with the hoarse impatience of the fumara, tearing headlong down to drown itself in the heedless, smiling waters of the gulf. From here they looked a woven carpet of sapphire and amethyst and emerald.

The place where Marotz sat was hidden from the house, where no one seemed stirring. She had laid aside her book, and her eyes were looking far away to Pæstum, which they could not see, only the pearl-pink veil of distance in which the temples and the shore lay swathed. Close in front of her was a balustrade of broken marble, and beyond it a steep and rugged cliff leading down into the gorge.

Her gaze in truth looked far beyond Pæstum and the Calabrian mountains, farther south to her Sicilian home, that seemed immeasurably remote. At the Reparation it had never seemed far away. Nor had she really missed her people there. For she had never been home-sick; their absence had been merely physical.

Why had Rodrigo married her?

What had she expected of marriage and of him? And what had either yielded her?

No doubt she had expected too much of life, and, constituting him its priest, the expert of its mysteries, had expected too much of him also. The temple had seemed sacred, and he had been at pains to let her understand that it was profane. She had put her hand in his, with tremulous anticipation, for him to lead her to its most holy, secret shrine; and he had taken her through splendid corridors, up wonderful steps of gorgeous marbles, to a golden curtain, which he had pulled back with a hard unfaith. And behind it there was nothing.

Was there worse than nothing? Were there indeed mysteries, but mysteries foul and obscene? Was it a devil who grinned in the flickering dark of the shrine where she had thought a shekinah rested?

A woman was clambering up the steep slope, and Marotz turned her sombre eyes to watch. The woman seemed quite young, and had a tiny child pressed against her bosom with one hand; with the other she helped herself to mount the rough and difficult ascent.

Marotz watched her, continuing her thoughts. And at last the other girl was close to her, outside the broken marble parapet with its imperfect balustrade.

"Who are you?" Marotz asked. "Do you want me?"

It was obvious the other woman had climbed here to get close to herself. She stood panting in the starling sunlight, with one hand still clutching her baby, with the other, resting herself, on the flat top of the balustrade.

Marotz herself sat in the cool shade of an alcove

on a round bench of beautifully carved marble. Still there was not more than a yard or two between them.

"I should like to see you," said the girl. "I came to look at you if I could. You must be worth looking at."

The tone was rather hard than insolent, but it certainly was not respectful, and no one had ever yet spoken disrespectfully to Marotz till this morning. It made her think of her husband.

"Who are you?" she said again.

"Yes," the girl with the baby ejaculated, "you are worth looking at. I am glad of that. It would make me despise him if it were only for your money. You have enough money to fill hell with. Eh? And are you a principessa! And a duchessa! And a contessa! How many people at once? But it was not that only, I see. You are worth looking at."

"Who are you?"

"Who am I? Who are you, do you think?"

Marotz said in a low voice:

"I think you know who I am. Why do you ask, if you know?"

"I know who you think yourself to be. I know what they call you—the Duchessa di Revigliano!"

Marotz was already standing up. She had stood up at once, and the girl noticed it. It seemed to her strange. Had she been Marotz she would have sat still scornfully, but it was she, she herself who spoke scornfully. Marotz came close to her, so that only the marble balustrade was between them, and looked straightly and honestly into the girl's deep eyes.

"Go on," said Marotz, not roughly, but with a horrible still patience and expectance.

"If I tell you who I am you will not believe."

"Why? People never tell lies to me. You will not."

"No; one would tell the truth only to those eyes of yours. Shall I tell it?"

"I have asked you to tell it. I am asking you."

The girl paused a moment with a peculiar, gathering reluctance, always watching the exquisite still face before her. One would have said that she would have wished, now it came to the point, to have said nothing.

"It is not my fault if what I say is true," she replied.

"Nor mine," said Marotz. "Now say it."

"I am your husband's wife."

What struck the girl who said this was that the other girl, the princess and duchess, and so forth, at once believed her.

"My husband! If you are his wife," she said in a plain voice—that was incomparably more dreadful than any passion or tragedy could have made it—"if you are his wife, how can he be my husband?"

"Listen! I make no lies. I pretend nothing. He made you his duchess. I am no duchess. I am Cica, daughter of Giannino the goat-herd. But your Duke loved me, and does love me still. Does he love you?"

To this Marotz made no answer in prompt words, but looked still into the questioning face so near her own.

"You are a thousand times more beautiful than I," the girl went on. "But he loves me."

"Alas! is that all?"

"No. I too love him, though he has done this. Do you?"

Marotz lifted herself a little, and her delicate thin hand trembled on the warmer marble.

"I thought I did."

"Yes. One sees that. You did no wrong. But he? Did he ever think he loved you?"

"I thought so. But you are right. He never has. He never even fancied he did . . . Is there any more you have to say?"

"Yes, Signora Duchessa. For I am only his wife. He never dreamt of making me a duchessa. I never dreamt it. It was him I wanted, as he wanted me, and took me. I never thought of his titles, or of his money, only he asked me to give him what I had. And in return I thought he would give me himself. I told him. And he said yes, over yonder, on the other side of the valley, where the chapel is, Our Lady of Confidence. And we went in there together; I asked him, and he said yes. There was no one but ourselves, no priest nor witness, only God. He witnessed for me, and my angel and Rodrigo's, and the Madonna della Confidenza. We knelt together there, on an afternoon like this, all sunlight and wind; it rattled in the roof. We knelt in front of the altar where Our Lady sits, with her *bambino* in her arms," and the girl pressed her own closer, "and there he swore he would be true to me, to me only, and I to him, and God heard, and His Mother, only them, and Rodrigo took a ring—this one—from his white, lovely hand and put it on my brown finger here, where it is now. And he said we were married by God, the priest from whom the other priests borrow their right to be priests. And that is all. I never thought he would marry again. I did not think he could have any

other wife, any more than I could have any other husband. I never thought of being a duchess, only of belonging to him, as he would belong to me. But now he has married again, and he has a duchess and a wife too."

Marotz never doubted it. It was all as true as the sky and the sea.

"I am not his duchess," she said plainly. "No man has two wives. And you are his."

Certainly she trembled. But the other girl trembled more.

"What have I done?" she cried. "I never thought—I never once thought that a princess like you would think that. I thought you would call me bad names and spit at me. . . . You are the Duchessa di Revigliano; I am only Cica, his wife, the goat-herd's daughter, the mother of our child."

Marotz looked at her pitifully.

"Oh, yes!" cried Cica, "and there will be another. Ours as well. But you are the Duchessa; I never dreamt of being Duchessa di Revigliano."

"God help us. It is not your fault, but if there is any Duchessa di Revigliano it is you."

She turned away, not angrily nor scornfully—Cica saw that—but with finality.

"Where are you going?"

"Away," said Marotz. "I am not bad like you think. I made a mistake. Nevertheless I could not know. But I know now, and I must go away."

Cica stared at her, her own deep eyes flooding. She had never seen a silent, uncomplaining grief before. Those she had known had ever been loud in grief and noisy in protestation of hard treatment. She was a

peasant, with very old and simple notions of the privileges of the great. Surely it was all wrong, this absolute reversal of the order of things. The poor, like her, were born to sorrow, as the sparks fly upward. But what had sorrow or shame to do with a great princess like this, who had believed her.

"Signora Duchessa!" she cried, and at the name thus given Marotz shuddered. "Duchessa, Signora Duchessa, turn back. It was a lie! We were never married like that. It was only—only the common story that you know."

But Marotz, though she did turn, turn and lay her hand upon the girl's, knew better.

"Cica" she said, "you said you would tell no lies to me. I know when to believe."

CHAPTER XVI

HAD any one been watching Marotz as she walked, rather slowly, across the garden to the villa, they would have noticed no sign of agitation; her manner was not nervous nor were her movements hurried.

High up overhead, at the top of Finestra, the westering sun, hidden behind the mountain, had just got far enough to shoot his shaft of white light through the window in the rocky peak. She noticed this, and how exquisite was the beauty piled tier on tier, from where she stood right up to that lonely summit. But this was not with any sense of farewell, though she had entirely made up her mind to go, and to go at once. There would be singularly little difficulty about her going, and she felt glad that it was so greatly simplified by the absence of Rodrigo and his mother. In no case would he return from Naples till the train which reaches Cava at ten minutes past twenty-two o'clock; that is to say, he could not be at the villa before half-past ten. The Duchess, however, would get back from Pompei about quarter past seven. Unfortunately, that train was the first now available going south, and the idea of taking the other direction and going to Naples was unpleasant. She did not feel as if she could bear to be in a large city. She must think it over.

Almost exactly as she reached the door from the

garden leading into the long, rather ugly, hall of the villa, a footman came to it, as though about to seek her out of doors, and she saw at once that he had a telegram.

"Wait a moment," she said, "I may have to send an answer." All the same she felt sure it was the now frequent notice from Rodrigo that he was not returning.

She was wrong; it was from the Duchessa, and was very long and very incoherent, but meant to convey the fact that she and Daria, her maid, were remaining at Valle de Pompei.

"Non c'é risposta. But send Ancilla to my room. And tell Santino that at six o'clock—no, a little sooner, say at quarter to six—I will have a carriage."

Then she went on, up the bare, cold staircase, full of green shadows from the trees that grew close up against its windows.

Almost immediately Ancilla joined her.

"I want my things packed. Get the boxes out and pack them at once. We need not take all with us, but I should like all to be ready. We are leaving here at quarter to six, and shall drive to Salerno; there we shall take the train from Naples which leaves at twenty-and-a-half o'clock. We can get what food we want at Salerno before the train comes."

Ancilla was puzzled, and did n't mind saying so; having belonged to the San Vito all her life she felt that they also belonged to her, and their interests were her own. Why take the train coming *from* Naples. Was any one ill at San Vito?

"No, Ancilla. By the way, you have reminded

me; I will telegraph to them from Salerno, or their letters will go on coming here."

"Are you not going either to Naples or San Vito? I thought perhaps the Duke was ill and her Excellency was going to Naples."

"No, Ancilla. He is, I suppose, quite well."

Marotz then observed simply that she would prefer that Ancilla said nothing down-stairs about their going.

"I have ordered the carriage; but at that hour I have driven before. They need not be told I am going away till I have gone."

"The animals!" observed Ancilla dispassionately, who did not admire Neapolitans, at all events Neapolitan servants.

As the carriage drove round to the door another telegram reached the villa; this time it was from Rodrigo, and was to say that he could not return that night, and would therefore remain at Naples until the following evening.

Except that Marotz had fully decided that she could never sleep in that house again, her departure might easily have been deferred till the morning.

"The Duke," she informed the butler, "is not coming back to-night."

When the servant saw the luggage he supposed that his mistress was herself joining the Duke, and perhaps not returning to Cava, which she found, possibly, dull, as he did.

Marotz got into the carriage; Ancilla took her place opposite; the footman who was going shut the door and put on his hat, till now held in his hand, then mounted the box, and the coachman put on his hat

also. The butler bowed, and the other footmen who were not going. Marotz returned their salutes, and the carriage drove off, down the steep and crooked lane, with walls on either hand, down to the narrow arcaded street of the town, where a little crowd was reading the winning numbers outside a Banco Lotto; past the open piazza of the Church of the Olmo, and so out again on to the Salerno road.

Away to the left Annunziata hung in the sunlight; all to the right, under the huge wall of mountain, was in cold shadow. It was strange how it was hot afternoon in the one direction, and chilling evening already in the other.

Just over the bridge was a group of strangers hesitating as to the way up to the Badia. Immediately afterwards they came to the fabbrica where common earthenware is made, and Marotz noticed how like the shapes and tints of the specimens outside were to those they make at San Vito.

All this time the road was descending, and now Vietri, with its tiled dome of green and yellow, like a lizard, came in sight at the corner of the cliff; some men were hanging long strips of macaroni outside a house to dry; they had just made it. It was very yellow, and the strips were four or five feet long, doubled over a frame.

The road twists sharply into Vietri, and one can turn away, if one likes, from Salerno, and go by many winding curves up to Raito, or along the *cornice* to Maiori and Amalfi.

Immediately after leaving Vietri, Salerno shows itself, looking exceptionally beautiful in the distance. But far more lovely did the *pianura* of Pæstum look,

not revealing its beauty, but hinting it, and Marotz resolved she would go there.

At Salerno they discovered that there was no train that night which stopped at Pæstum, and Marotz saw that there was no better plan than to remain at Salerno, and ordered the carriage to drive to the albergo. There she dismissed it, giving a present to the men, as if she had not been their mistress. If they were surprised they were too well trained to show it.

"*Buon' Viaggio, Eccellenza,*" said the coachman.

"*Buon' Viaggio, Signora Duchessa,*" said the footman.

"Ancilla," said Marotz, as they drove away, "do not, please, call me any more Signora Duchessa; I am Principessa di Torre Marco, and by that name only shall I be known now."

About eight o'clock, dinner was served in her private room. She had taken a little apartment of three rooms for the night, not intending to remain longer. Ancilla waited on her, and she tried to eat, but had no appetite. Then she went out on to the balcony and sat there watching the moonlit sea.

CHAPTER XVII

THEY arrived at Pæstum next morning a little before eleven o'clock, and were, of course, at once informed that there is no sort of albergo. Pesto is the name of the railway station, but there is no town or village: the name stands for nothing but the three great temples.

The station-master was a big, burly person who had one idea, and that was the malaria, whereof, he stated firmly, all previous station-masters had died. No one could look healthier, but he was evidently determined to die of it himself.

"Look there!" said Marotz. "That is not a temple." Less than half a mile away stood a big square house, with turrets at two of the corners.

"Neither is it an albergo," protested the Capo-Stazione, insisting on his previous accuracy. "There is no albergo: there is no *paese*. Her Excellency cannot stop here. One sees the temples: one says *Ecco!* and one returns—to Naples, or to London, or New York. It is thus. *I* indeed remain! *Ma!*" and he pointed along the empty road as who should say, "Behold the hearse which will carry *me* away."

"I cannot stop *here*, perhaps," said Marotz, "but I will stop *there*." And she started off towards the big house.

It was the grange of Mariana: it was a house which

suggested, if that were possible, a loneliness greater than its own. But it was not possible. To right and left the empty plain, in front the empty sea; behind, two leagues away, the empty mountains. It was so big that its isolation seemed more preposterous. What could such a house do there?

It was gaunt and bare, old and weather-beaten, but untamed by age, and unsoftened by time. There was not the smallest suggestion of comfort about it, nor the faintest promise of hospitality. It had a hard and resolute expression. As they drew nearer Marotz could see there was at the back a big garden, walled all round; but the wall was too high to give any idea of what sort of a garden it might be—neglected and wild certainly, that was all one felt sure of. It was by the back and side of the house that they drew near it; but there was no "approach"; it stood up blankly out of the staring green of the fields, with no large trees near. Farther off there were a few tall grey eucalypti. Wallowing in oozy water-meadows were ugly black buffaloes with malevolent eyes. No one seemed moving about the big house, or indeed anywhere.

But as they drew close to it a man on a well-bred black horse, carrying a long gun, with pistols stuck obviously in his holsters, rode out of the farmyard and met them. He looked with an alert interest, but without impertinence or curiosity, at Marotz and Ancilla, and immediately saluted them, reining in his horse, for Marotz showed that she wished to speak.

It was early in the season for tourists, and any one could see that the two strangers were Italian.

"I want to stay here," Marotz explained. "Per-

haps for a few days only; perhaps for longer. And there is, I find, no albergo."

She then asked, without more ado, if she and her maid could stay *there*, in the tall, square house, whereof she concluded that he was the master.

He at once explained that he was the Intendente, and lived there; the land all about belonged to his master, whom probably her Excellency knew, who lived at Naples, and never came here. Certainly the house was big, and no doubt there were the rooms which would be occupied by his master if he ever came: and *something* they could give her to eat; but his wife was not a good cook. . . .

"I can cook," observed Ancilla.

This was noble of her, as it was impossible that she could have wished for her own sake to remain an hour in such a place.

The man smiled; he was a steady married man of three and thirty, but both the strangers were agreeable objects to look upon, and he was quite able to perceive their quality.

If they really chose to rough it in his house it would certainly be very interesting for his wife and her sister and himself.

He had got off his fine horse long ago, and now led them round to the front of the house, where there were four arched doors, none of which looked like a front door.

He was a handsome enough fellow, with a resolute, honest, alert face; Marotz had never seen any one so tanned.

He saw her glance at his pistols and his gun.

"Her Excellency then is not afraid of brigands?" he said laughing.

"Are there brigands?"

"Pochi: ma basta."

He gave his horse to a lad who looked himself like the first volume of a brigand; and went in search of his wife. Some huge white oxen, with smoke-coloured muzzles, and enormous black horns, had just brought home a peculiar long cart, and were standing lazily waiting for another load. Presently the Intendente and his wife appeared; and Marotz at once liked her. She had a quiet, delicate manner, and a good comely face; she was probably eight and twenty, but had been married ten years and was a staid matron.

On pretence of going up-stairs to look at the *appartamento nobile*, the three women left the Intendente to himself; but they returned soon, and Marotz told him that everything had been arranged.

"Now," she said, "you may as well, Signore Intendente, send those bullocks and the cart to the station for my *bauli*. The Capo-Stazione will be indignant! He assured me that I must go away."

"As soon as they come," observed Ancilla, "I will unpack them, and the Signore Principessa shall be installed."

If her mistress was no longer to be a duchess, people should at all events be aware that she was a princess.

"Le principesse anche sono poche sula pianura di Pesto, mi pare," she assured herself.

CHAPTER XVIII

MAROTZ was sitting alone in the temple of Demeter, as early in the day she had sat for hours in the greater temple of Poseidon. She had been alone all day.

It was a day all blue and gold and green; hot and fresh and youthful; she saw none of the famed roses that Tasso sang of, that Propertius saw fainting in the south-east wind's burning breath, and that Ausonius says he beheld fresh with the dewy sunrise. But the temples stood ankle deep in a tangle of flowers that must, she thought, blossom always, not twice merely in the year. The souls of myriads of Greeks, like little butterflies, hovered about the tall, grey-pink spires of asphodel, and a soft breeze played with them, and told funny secrets to the reeds and grasses that shook themselves with whispering laughter.

Sometimes she had sat in the pleasant warm shadow of the temple of Poseidon, looking across the belt of bright green plain to his hyacinth-blue sea, that seemed at this distance waveless. There were no ships on it, though Odysseus might have sailed up out of the shimmering distance and she could never have been surprised.

But the landward pictures framed between the columns of this temple of Demeter were lovelier; it seemed as if the gods had woven the mountains into a curtain of beauty, as women try to weave silks.

The rolling, broken plain ran in and out among their feet, bidding them come close and see how yellow was the strand, and some of the smaller ones seemed to have half-accepted the challenge and had come forward a little. But there were bigger ones and bigger, a tangle of mountains, and a tangle of gorge and valley; a maze of colours and of distances. One could not imagine that any one lived among them or knew his way among them. And yet from one place she could see, when the sun had gone far enough westward to shine around the corner of a mountain that had seemed one vague blue mass till then, that a little pink town fluttered, like a hundred of these butterflies, on a jut of rock that separated itself now into a leaning mountain of its own.

Still it was absurd to think that any one lived there; that people were laughing in its streets, or that there were any streets; it must be like the little town which the poet imagines emptied of its folk one pious morn to follow the mysterious priest and lowing heifer to the carven sacrifice. They would never come back, they had accepted instead a lovely unvexed immortality, a perennial youth of beauty.

Neither could such a town have any name, any more than it could have any way that led to it. In a remoteness that it would be teasing to calculate, it held a kind of smiling aloofness; inviting no visitor, answering no question; and presently, with some swift change of light and shadow, vanished. No doubt it was but the ghost of a little hill-town that Greeks had set there, long dead, and come back to haunt an hour the place it had once held among the mountains.

Marotz did not try to think about any of these things. She was not desirous of thinking. She wanted to rest. She was not tired of life, but life had tired her, and she asked it to be fair and let her rest. She did not want to discuss and measure rights and wrongs, or weigh faults and apportion blame, or seek out excuses. She had never had any holiday; here she would like to pause and wait and sit at holiday for a day or two that need not be counted or accounted for. Presently she must get up and walk on, but first she wanted to just breathe and be at ease, and feel the sun and the tender gale, and smell the netted fragrance of grass and flowers.

She had been so deeply wounded that she had scarcely felt the pain, or been capable of feeling anything. Life would be long enough to feel everything, let there be a little numb pause wherein she would look out and see what was strewn around so lavishly. Her eyes were sick of the inward strain, and she would rest them by gazing on what was here, had been here for ever, and would be here long after she herself had ceased to matter.

She had not come to ask sympathy of nature, only to look at it; and history, that lay asleep and smiling here, she did not want to awake and question. Memory and hope, let them sleep too; only let beauty suffer her to sit silent and watch her, as she wove her arras over and about where the spacious past had been.

Her wound had been bitter and terribly deep; and she had not cried out on God to look at it and pity her for it. When she hurt herself as a child, it had never been her way to run wailing to any one and display her bruises, calling for compassion, not even to

her father. Still less had she ever imagined it would salve her own pains then that some one else, who had been to blame for them, should be punished.

Nor in these last days had she ever desired that for her injury any one should be brought to account. She could not think of Rodrigo di Toledo without a blush that lay deeper than her skin. She had lived with him as if she had been his wife, and another girl had been his wife all the time. But to remember his punishment did not ease her: his punishment which must be—that he should be himself.

Neither did she lose sense of proportion because his fault had been half against herself. Of course he never meant that she should know: it was outside his calculation that she should discover the truth. He had intended to make her in all legality Duchess of Revigliano, and he, no doubt, considered that he had done so. *He* would have said that he had married her. But that, as Marotz held, was not true. He had another wife, legal or not legal, and he had never really meant to give Marotz herself that which a wife has a right to.

She understood now how cold he had been, and could perceive that in his relations towards herself there had been always, even in the very beginning of their so-called marriage, something repugnant to himself. Assuredly he had never loved her or meant to love her.

He had given her, legally enough his name and title, his coronet, and the right to add his wealth to her own, and had simply not suspected that this was not enough.

There have been men who have desired the beauty

of some woman, and paid that sort of price for it, being unable to buy it cheaper, and there have been fathers and mothers who have been willing to sell their daughters' beauty at that price, and girls, perhaps, who have been ready themselves so to sell their beauty to such a bidder. But Rodrigo di Toledo had not made such a bargain, his price had been paid not even for that. He did not care particularly for the possession of her singular loveliness, though he had been able to recognise it, and though he had resolved to possess it rather than it should be possessed by another man; all he had meant was to make of her the Duchess of Revigliano.

CHAPTER XIX

THE day of emerald and gold and amethyst had changed into a night of ebony and silver. Marotz sat looking out into it, and was still alone. Every one else was asleep, and she too would have slept had she been able; this was her third night without sleep.

Behind her was the gaunt, bare room, with its grim, unused air; what furniture there was matched the tall, dark room well. The ceiling was vaulted and had long ago been painted by some Salernitan artist whose colours had grown black now, even by day. The walls were painted too, and one grew tired of Neptune and his sea-horses everywhere; the floor was paved with scagliola to look like ripples on a shallow shore.

One of the big, high windows was thrown wide open to the balcony, and here Marotz sat listening to the night. The booming cry of the marsh-frogs sounded as if each pool and black ditch had itself found a voice, and was not like the noise of any imaginable live thing.

There was no breeze and the stillness magnified every sound. The temples and the basilica stood brilliantly white, with the black plain all around, and the black sea beyond.

To-morrow her father and mother would be here.

When Ancilla came out to look for her at sunset, she had brought a telegram, saying that Hals and Lucia were both coming to her.

Marotz shrank from their coming, though she herself had let them know where she was, and had known that they would come at once. She hated the necessity of telling them why she was here alone. She hated to speak of it at all, and hated even more to think of it.

She shrank away from sympathy, even theirs; the only bearable thing was to be alone.

How could they be with her and not speak of what had happened? And how could they speak of it? She hated to think of what they would feel. If only she could have hidden herself in silence.

She did not want to share with any one. She had nothing good to share.

She gave up thinking of their coming, and tried to rest in the effortless sense of the beauty of the night. All day long she had been envying the vanished people who had been here once. They had, indeed, gone, leaving no tombs to say that they had merely died; they had simply passed onward in the long procession of beauty, leaving just the three footprints yonder to mark that their feet had rested here.

How cheerful they were! How untroubled. How unvexed with dark question and heavy load of responsibility and care. Their life was a smile on a fair face: just a smile on the eternal face of nature. The face endures, the smile passed, but did it care?

It suddenly seemed a revelation to her that they had had no souls: no souls of the sort we wot of, to lose or save, to be the battle-field of a life-long strug-

gle; perhaps that it was that had given them their buoyant lightness of spirit. Of course they had spirit: everything has that, the mountains and the sea yonder, the plain here, rivers and trees. But the sad prerogative of an indestructible soul they had lacked, and its absence was the smile of their exquisite race. That would explain why our standards have never been applied to them, why no one has execrated their naughtiness or extolled their virtue. They had no more virtue than a fragrant garden, no more vice than a peacock.

Their immortality was not personal, and could not therefore be lost, any more than it could be possessed, by an individual. Their immortality was unconscious, as it was impersonal, like Shakespeare's or Homer's, only wider. It gave them no trouble and could stab them with no misgiving. It was a light that time could not extinguish, nor misadventure cloud; a sweet breath that space and distance could only diffuse, not dissipate or destroy; above all, a smile that could never be washed away in tears.

Even in the north they have had this notion of fair bodies exempt from the tedious inheritance of a soul. She remembered Undine; but such beings could be general only in the broad sunlight of the south: there they could be a whole race, a golden chain of happy people hung round Time's neck while Time was young.

Then there came the sharp sting of a triple memory of her brother, and her mother's brother, and her grandfather's, each with the dishonoured fetters of his Christian ruined soul binding him. Surely it would have been better that they had been dispensed

from the prerogative that was too high for them. There have been princes who were ruined by their lofty calling, who seem as if they might have been happy and good men but for the royalty that they were not fit to carry.

Would her own son be like those three?

She never doubted that the child she had to bear would be a son. Would the taint that for three generations had stained men of her kindred spare him? What sort of soul would be his, of what quality would be his father's share in it? Nay, that share which came from her side, what would it be like?

Surely it would be better to be born without a soul than to be born with such a one as she could foresee.

She leant forward and gazed deeper into the folded mysteries of the night. Her brain ceased to beat and throb, the strained sense of pressure suddenly relaxed, and the whirring of her thoughts subsided into a warm peace.

She was *sure* the choice had been given her. That she could decide.

What would she be depriving him of? Of an instrument to slay himself with, of a weapon to turn against God Himself.

She stood up, holding the chill iron of the *grille* of the balcony, and leant against it; the whole face of the tall, gaunt, grey house stared white into the night, the moon flinging her broad streams of silver down upon it, and on Marotz too. Her own face was white also, all but the sombre eyes.

"I choose," she said,

CHAPTER XX

WHEN Hals and Lucia arrived Ancilla met them at the station, and showed them the way to the house, which indeed it would have been impossible for them to miss. Marotz had gone out early to the temples and had not returned.

Ancilla was rather scandalised that the prince and princess should have to walk, but everything had been so peculiar lately that this phenomenon also merged in the general oddness of circumstances.

She was determined to have a little say of her own if she got the chance; and seeing that they could hardly avoid asking how her mistress was, she foresaw her chance pretty clearly. Ancilla was not a gossip, and she knew very well that, no matter how greatly inclined she might have been that way, no one could gossip with Prince Nostitz or his wife. But what she wanted to say was not gossip, and she wanted very much to secure their hearing it. Nor on the whole was she unsuccessful. With few enough words they gathered all that she wished to convey, and it explained why Marotz was here alone. Nevertheless it was not the true explanation, for Ancilla knew nothing of Cica's interview with her mistress, or of what Cica had told her.

At the house they left Ancilla, and went on together to look for Marotz, whom they found asleep

in the temple of Demeter. She was sitting leaning against one of the creamy fluted columns, her thin hands clasped tightly in her lap. Her long black lashes lay upon her cheek and her lips were a little parted. She looked like one who sleeps heavily at last, worn out with too long wakefulness.

They were quite near before the sound of their coming woke her, and she smiled to see them there.

"How lazy I am," she said; "I must have slept for hours. It was quite early when I came here and I meant to have met you. But I sat down here, and I was so tired I fell asleep."

She stood up and came to meet them, and it seemed to them that she looked taller; thinner she undoubtedly was. She was certainly changed: much more changed than she had been by her five months' absence last year. It seemed impossible that she could be only eighteen. It is very rarely that a girl of that age holds a dignity like hers.

Though her manner to them was most gentle and caressing, like that of a child, she seemed to both of them a great lady, and Hals asked himself in astonishment how any one could have dared to treat her lightly. And her beauty was more rare than of old.

Again, with an angry pang, he thought how incredible it was that she should have been so valueless to her husband. He had always been jealous of him. A man is seldom grateful to the lover that carries off his daughter, and this fellow had not even been a lover.

"After all," said Marotz, when she had received their greetings and embraces, "it is not every one

that has the chance of welcoming their friends in such state. At the Masseria you will not be so fine."

Certainly her surroundings were worthy of her. The temple, as she said, was a grander place of reception than any palace could afford, and her father felt that it fitted her well.

They all sat down and without prelude she told her story, and told it with the simplicity that was inseparable from herself. Of Rodrigo's treatment of her since their marriage she scarcely spoke at all. Knowing what Ancilla had told them they could, indeed, read its confirmation now in her very reticence, but they learned at once that the reason of her leaving him was not there.

It may seem odd to some readers, but they neither blamed her nor were scandalised at what she had done. They both knew her, and neither of them could have imagined her acting differently. No doubt *they* were influenced to some extent by what they knew of her husband's behaviour since his marriage to her. That, in their opinion, would have justified her in leaving him; but they fully saw that had there been no such offence she, being Marotz, must have left him all the same.

"He may endeavour to force you to live with him," said Lucia; "you must be prepared for that."

"No one can force me to live with a man whose wife I do not believe myself to be."

They both, as she sat before them, drawing the long grasses through her fine, delicate fingers, knew that in truth no one could.

"I mean," said her mother, "he may attempt to do that by legal pressure. Is it not so, Hals?"

"He might. But after I have seen him he will not," her husband answered in his quiet voice, that even now sounded indolent.

In her heart Marotz thanked him. Soft, almost, as the tones were, they had a promise that was effectual.

"Suppose he insists on seeing you," suggested Lucia. "One must be prepared for the chance of that."

"He cannot *insist* on seeing me," said Marotz proudly, "but I will see him if it be necessary."

It was easy to see that she had not *run away*. She was not in the least afraid of him, or of any legal bogey he might threaten her with.

Hals was quite prepared to insure her against any forced meeting with Rodrigo, but as he looked at her he could not help feeling how little she would need any one's help. No one could make Toledo understand how futile any dream would be of compelling her to resume the position of his wife, so well as he would understand it when once he had met her.

"There must be discussions, perhaps," she went on, "and arrangements. But if possible I would rather be spared discussing anything with him myself."

"*That* you *shall* be spared," said Hals, biting a long blade of parched grass.

"You see," Marotz said, a deep flush burning her face, "there is a thing he does not know."

Lucia turned sharply, and their eyes met, and instantly she, who so seldom wept, felt herself blinded with tears.

"Oh my child, my child!" she cried. "Alas! my poor Marotz."

Hals got up and leant against a pillar, and looked towards the mountains. "It is the most exquisite picture I have ever seen," he said to himself. He did not want to think.

"Of course," said Marotz gently, "it is that which will add real difficulties to my situation."

She had got up from her place and was sitting now beside her mother, her hand laid on Lucia's.

"I can quite see it all," she went on. "I have seen nothing else these last three days, no matter what I looked at—to-day and yesterday and the day before. It is a terrible difficulty. But no difficulty can make any difference. I know it is his child as well as mine. He will have legal rights over it."

"After all," murmured Lucia rather feebly, "he is legally your husband."

Marotz paused and looked beyond her father at the mountains framed between the creamy columns.

"I am not an *avvocato*," she said presently, "but, it seems to me, even that is not quite certain."

Hals did not turn and look at her, as Lucia did; but she knew very well he was attending.

"That he intended Cica to believe he was marrying her there in the chapel I am certain," she continued. "In law such a marriage might not count as a marriage. It would be what the Church calls clandestine. But in the Church much is made of '*sponsalitia*' betrothal, and this might prove to be a bar to any future marriage when kept secret from us, and when no dispensation from such an impediment had been sought or obtained it might prove to be regarded as a very important bar. If he pressed me unfairly I would see. Perhaps the Pope himself would declare

that this marriage with me was null owing to a pre-contract."

Hals and Lucia both thought they remembered cases where marriages had in fact been so declared void by the head of their Church for similar causes.

"The legality of our marriage," the girl went on, "is not, I think, so simple as it seems. I mean the validity from the ecclesiastical point of view, and in Italy the State would be very unlikely to try and force a woman like me to pass as the wife of a man to whom the highest ecclesiastical voice declared she was not actually married at all. Our Church says the consent of the contracting parties is the essence of the contract, and that there can be no sacrament where the contract is void, as it would be if the consent were not mutual, free and unconditional. My consent was, of course, conditional on his being free to marry me, and would never have been given if I had known what we all know now."

Hals was inclined to think that she might be right. Lucia was less disposed to do so; but neither of them could feel any desire that it should be proved that their child had not even legally been the wife of the man who was the father of the child she would bear.

But it was like Hals to tell her frankly anything which he thought supported her view.

"There was, not very long ago, in this Pope's reign, a case that you may think helps out what you are saying. The Prince of M. married the daughter of an English noble, and they had a child. Afterwards the Princess declared that there were circumstances that voided her consent. How that could be proved

except by such proof as her oath afforded, one cannot see; but it was considered proved. And the Pope pronounced the marriage null, though the child was declared legitimate."

Marotz thought the case bore very strongly indeed upon her own: if her father was less confident, he at least felt that there was enough in it to strengthen his own hands materially in dealing with Toledo.

CHAPTER XXI

"Does Toledo know you are here?" he inquired.

"I have not told him. The day I left Cava I wrote to him, while Ancilla was packing; but I did not say anything as to where I might go. I merely told him why I was going. Then I telegraphed to you not to go on writing there. As soon as I was here I telegraphed again to let you know where I was. Of course he may easily find out where I am; I did nothing to cover up my tracks, if he chose to follow them."

Lucia was thinking of her father. She could not promise herself that he would look on it all as she and Hals did, and from his masterful temper and pride she dreaded more trouble for Marotz.

Presently Marotz herself spoke of him.

"I do not want to go to San Vito," she said. "But I will go, if it is necessary that I should explain everything to Nonno. It is unfair that you should have to, and he would be more cross with you even than with me."

Her father turned and saw the queer little smile on her lovely face, that looked so girlish and yet so unlike an ordinary girl's.

"If you do not want to come to San Vito," he said, "I will do all the explaining to Nonno. I am not such a coward as you think!"

"I give you both nothing but trouble!" she de-

clared, with a rather piteous little laugh. "First the Reparation and now this. What will Zia say?"

"Zia," replied Hals, "will blame the San Vito marriages for several generations. It will be imputed to your grandmother, and to me, and so you will get off." He knew she did not want to get off.

"I think I had better see Nonno," she declared. "Of course I cannot ask him to come here."

Hals was not sure that the old Duke would abstain from coming, and he had a feeling that Marotz could deal more equally with him here on neutral ground, or rather on ground that she had oddly made to seem her own.

"I do not *want* to go to San Vito," she said again. "Just for a little while I would like to stay here. No place would irritate me less at present. Then I would like to go to Torre Marco if Nonno would not mind."

Lucia and Hals both thought of Torre Marco and its long-disused castle, gaunt and remote, more deeply embedded in the mountains even than San Vito; but they both partly understood her desire to go there.

Anyway it was now her own, and its people were her own. She would like her child, who might be its prince, to be born there. Certainly no one would be near to tease her.

This singular father and mother, instead of finding fault with all their daughter's decisions, quietly considered them and found them as good as any plans they could themselves suggest.

"I suppose we may never come and see you there," said Hals.

"I invite you both! Come whenever Nonno is cross, and Zia mentions maggots."

"Then," declared her father cheerfully, "we shall be in future very little at San Vito."

Some one was drawing near the temple, and Marotz made a signal which he saw; neither Hals nor Lucia could see it, for they were not looking at her. They were standing now just outside the temple, and their faces were turned towards that of Poseidon, which from here scarcely seemed a ruin.

"Go there and look at it," said Marotz. "Leave me here a little—I would rather. If you get tired of waiting go back to the Masseria, where Ancilla and I will feed you. You have never been my guests before! There is a room for you, and Ancilla will share hers with Rosalia if you have brought her."

She showed them a little path through the long grass that she herself had made in her passings to and fro, and watched them go along it. Then she turned, and going back into her own temple stood waiting; even if they had turned to look they could not have seen her; but the man to whom she had made her signal saw her and came up.

"My father and mother are there," she said, "and I thought you would wish to see me alone."

Her idea had been that they were three to one. Rodrigo understood; and if he had supposed that she would have any fear of meeting him he at once abandoned that notion. If she shrank from him, it was not from dread of his anger, or of his authority.

She sat down, and he came close to her, and leant against a column.

He found it surprisingly difficult to say any of the things he had rehearsed to himself, indeed to say anything at all. He looked down and watched her,

almost immediately understanding that no words of his would alter whatever determination she had made. It was part of his cleverness to be generally able to recognise the impossible at once.

"If you have anything to say to me," she said at last, "you had better say it. They may come back—though I asked them to go to the Masseria."

"I came to ask you if you intend to come back with me."

She immediately looked up in his face.

"And, now that you *have* come, do you think it worth while to ask?"

She saw that he did not. Nevertheless he said sternly enough,

"I can compel you to come back."

She did not take her eyes from his, as she slightly shook her head.

"No one can do that," she answered.

She was never prodigal of words, and her economy of them now was as effectual as any eloquence could have been.

"The law can."

She smiled quietly.

"I am not afraid of the law. I have done nothing to make me shy of it."

He knew she was not afraid of it. In his heart he told himself that she was altogether fearless. He was not a coward himself, and the quality of her courage was not thrown away on him.

"Can you not *see* you are indefensible?" he demanded. "No doubt you have a conscience!"

She knew that there was a sneer in this, but it did not touch her.

"I do not compare mine with yours," she said.

Her tone was so unmoved that he thought he would let her see that he was angry.

"There is no room for argument," he said, raising his voice a little; "I merely insist."

She did not raise her voice, nor did she lower her proud eyes as she answered:

"Duca di Revigliano, when you talk to me of insisting that I should go and live with you, you give yourself leave to insult me."

Oddly enough it was he who flushed, and, as she said this, he visibly started.

"*What* I am it has never much interested you to learn," she went on; "but at least you must know *who* I am." She paused, and then added with a ruthlessness that was the more terrible that it cut herself more than it could touch him: "For more than three months I did live with you; a child will be born of me of which you are the father. Is not that enough?"

Slowly a dark and hot blush had spread over her face, and he remembered clearly when he had once, and only once, seen her blush before. Could *she* fail to remember? She whom he had sneered at as an ex-nun, and who now thought of herself as having lain in his arms, never having been his wife.

He was a hard man, selfish and cold-hearted, but not in the least stupid or slow of appreciation. As he looked into her burning eyes he understood and he believed. Hitherto he had taken what she said, in the letter written to him from Cava before she left his house, as a pretext. She had found out his unfaithfulness since their marriage, and that had stung her pride and her jealousy; then the knowledge of the

previous affair with Cica had come to her, and she had used it as an excuse for leaving him.

Now he recognised the truth, and while it filled him with scorn of her unpractical childishness, he was not unable to see her point of view.

Almost at the same moment something else happened to him. Her glorious beauty at last appealed to him, and he told himself jeeringly that he was falling in love with her. He knew very well who she was, her high birth and her high breeding, her high character, and he read plainly enough what the discovery she conceived herself to have made of her own position in reference to him must be.

To him it was all a question of station; had she been as Cica it would in his eyes have been nothing.

"Marotz!" he cried, and his voice was sincere and even eager. "How can you be so blind?" It was in truth inconceivable to him that any girl not insane could look at it as she did.

"Ah!" she said sadly, "blindness is the incapacity to see what is obvious to some one else."

He was now, as he had never meant to be, on his own defence.

"Listen!" he urged, "you talk as if I had not married you!" This was the weary argument she had hoped to have avoided.

"Did you ever *intend* to marry me?" she asked. "A man who marries a girl intends to make her his wife. You never intended that. I see it all easily enough now. You meant to make me Duchess of Revigliano, that was all. They say there are girls who are content with such a bargain. But what had I ever done to make you think me one of them? Did

I need your name, or your coronet, or your wealth?"

She was standing up now, quite near him, so that the hand she held out upbraidingly almost touched him. But he knew it would not touch him, and he knew that he dare not touch her.

Had she altered, or had she really always been as beautiful as that?

He had recognised her beauty always, but never until now had it made any appeal to him. And he had acknowledged that she was very intelligent, but none the less he had half scorned her as a convent-raw girl. Now he knew better. Fearless as she was in other ways there was nothing in which she was more nobly free from fear than in her thoughts. There had never been anything in her thoughts she needed to be afraid of letting go forth as a word just as it stood.

"Look!" she said, demanding his attention with a cool authority. "Suppose there had been no Cica, still you would have in that ill-used me. Such a girl as I was, as you knew me, is not to be put off with a new name instead of a husband, a new title in place of love, a beggarly tolerance and half your income to make up for withholding what you promised. Had there been no Cica our marriage would have been still but a parody; our Church itself says that the man and woman are themselves the ministers of the sacrament, and she lays great words, therefore, on their lips. And you juggled with them! You swore to love me when you deliberately intended not to love me, never to love me. You cannot deny it. You vowed to worship me with your body. You know how you meant to do it."

He espied, he thought, a weak joint in her armour and he thrust coldly into it.

"And you? Have you kept your vow to love me?"

"You know my vow was given where I had no right to give it. I could not vow to God that I would love another woman's husband."

(He made an impatient sound, but she kept on firmly.)

"But that I did not know, and I took my vow meaning to keep it. You ask if I did keep it. You ask if I loved you. I began. To me that sort of love was all new. I had been loving all my life: but a lover was a new thing. Nevertheless I began. I might have learned. Did you ever mean to teach me?"

She so held his eyes with hers that he could not, if he would, have lied with his lips.

"I know now, at all events, what marriage is when it is true," she went on ruthlessly, "but only from contrast with what it can be when it is false. You at least taught me what the absence of love is, and that absence has shown me, shamefully, what it could be were it present. Think of it: and dare again, if you dare, to talk to me of insisting that I should come back with you to your house, and pretend to be your wife. You have profaned a sacrament; ask again, if you dare, that I should be your accomplice."

BOOK III



CHAPTER I

FOR ten years Marotz had been living at Torre Marco, not exactly like an English Lady Bountiful, but to the happiness and profit of her people. They were all hers, and they knew it gladly, for they were proud of their Princess, and she was not at all ashamed of them. Certainly they were not models, but they were human, and that was all she, who knew they were not divine, expected to find them. Their faults were not surprising, though their virtues might have surprised her now and then.

She was by no means alone all those ten years, though alone often and long. At first there had been only herself and Ancilla; then Hals and Lucia came. Presently they went away again, and after a while Lucia came back alone. Hals sent word that Nonno was not cross enough to justify him in supposing himself invited. Before Lucia left that time, Piccolo arrived. He, of course, came to stay. San Vito himself came over to look at him, and made no bones of declaring that he was much too like his grandfather.

"He will never look like a Sicilian," he assured them at San Vito when he returned, which he did not do in such a hurry as they had expected.

He found everybody being spoiled at Torre Marco, and it had taken him longer than he intended to go round and explain this clearly to them. As they had never been spoiled before, but conscientiously neg-

lected for a generation or two, they supposed the old Duke was right, but begged him to excuse it. The Principessa, they hinted, would be dull if she had not even the little pastime to which his Excellency alluded.

"Mariano says," bellowed Onofria, in what she hoped was Zia's best ear, "that the *bambino* is as fair as Hals, with blue eyes, and yellow hair already; he is exactly like his mother's father."

"He will be a maggot," observed Zia resolutely.

Hals had also gone to Torre Marco, and had arrived there before Nonno left.

Onofria, who loved an outing, and never got one, meekly petitioned now to go too. She was so meek about it that her husband nearly refused. Had she merely stated her intention of going it would not have occurred to him to object. In the long run she did go. But San Vito firmly refused to be left alone with Zia, and she had to wait till Hals and Lucia returned.

About a year after Piccolo obtruded his golden hair and blue eyes on San Vito's criticism, Zia quitted Sicily for ever. She had scarcely ever left it before, Naples having been the most northerly latitude ever attained by her; and she did not leave it now because she was tired of it and in search of novelty. She had a stroke, which gave a most peculiar twist to her face, and changed it to a note of somewhat disconcerted interrogation.

"One is a Christian," she protested crookedly, for her mouth was not where she had been accustomed to expect it. "But even Christians must die. That is a bad arrangement. Still it is the custom. One must abide by it."

"Dear Zia," whimpered Onofria, "do not be afraid."

The idea of the old woman's death terrified herself.

"Afraid! what of? *Per Carita!* Only one dislikes changes. I am used to you all here; if I were younger it would be different. Young persons like variety. But you do well enough for me, though San Vito is rough, and you are *sciocca*, and Hals and Lucia have maggots."

"Does it not tire you to talk so much? Don Antonio said you must keep still."

"Tire me! I shall have time enough to rest. Who is Don Antonio to give me orders? That is not the way. I say to him, 'I am bilious; you will send me a bilious physic, but not too nasty.' I have not suffered him to choose my disorders."

If Zia had chosen her present disorder, her taste must indeed have become eccentric. Something like this thought occurred to poor Onofria, but she certainly did not hint at it.

"Go away now and send Hals here. He makes me hear without shouting," said the ungrateful *morbonda*. "When you scream at me it is like a clock striking in my ear without letting me know what time it is."

Onofria was far from sorry to be released, and Hals did not mind taking her place, though Zia's stuffy room was not at all agreeable to him. He was never selfish in those ways. He sat down close to the old woman, who looked very queer in her big bed with its once splendid hangings. They were withered too, but still aristocratic, as, in an odd fashion, she was also.

"You won't be pious, at all events," observed Zia, grinning a long way to the left of her sharp nose.

"Not if I can help it," he promised politely.

Zia laughed.

"That was never your fault," she admitted handsomely. "You are mad, that is understood."

"Oh, perfectly. But I can't help it."

The doctrine of not being able to help it appealed comfortably to Zia just then. She could not help being fond of her money.

"Onofria is not mad," she remarked. "She is merely *sciocca*; that, however, is more tiresome. If they are all sensible where I am going I shall not know how to talk to them."

"San Vito is not mad, nor *sciocco*. He is entirely sensible."

"Yes. But he is rude, and so I make him replies to suit him. That is quite well in one's family, but it will not do among strangers." This idea of going among strangers was evidently disturbing her. "Onofria begged me not to be afraid," she complained, "and I heard her say that God is good. *Certo!* If not He, who, then? What have I done? Why should she guggle about mercy? What harm have I done Him in seventy-seven years?"

Indeed Hals could not, if he would, have suggested any.

"She is frightened because I am, perhaps, going to die. Why, then? I am not frightened. Only I hate journeys, and they give me cold. It was always so; and now it is bad weather. Also I dislike new places. I am used to these rooms, where I could be alone; in heaven, it appears, one lives in public."

She was really not afraid, but it was easy to see she was discomposed and full of vague forebodings of discomfort.

"God knows how to set us at our ease," suggested Hals. "He will make you feel at home."

"Hals," she said rather earnestly, "do you think He will be angry about me and my money?"

"About your money?"

"Yes. Because I have been fond of it. I have done no harm with it; some people buy wickedness with it. I never buy anything. And some spend it all on themselves. I never spent any on myself. Only I liked it, and it amused me. One must do something. Look here! What had I to do all these years? San Vito had his land to think of; and Onofria had San Vito. You had Lucia and Marotz, and Lucia had you and Marotz too, and Marotz had you both. I alone had nobody. So I sat by myself in these dull rooms, and had only my money."

An old yellow tear stood in the corner of her eye, and the paralysed hand could not wipe it away.

Hals laid his own hand gently upon hers.

"Poor Zia," he said. "It was not much that God should grudge it to you."

She looked at him almost eagerly. She did not mind him speaking about God because he was not pious.

"I know what they say," she went on, in her cracked and crooked voice. "'Man brought nothing into the world, and he can carry nothing out.' Men don't bring their children with them into the world; nor can they carry them out when they die. But a man may love his children as much as he likes all the

while he has them. And I have never had any child that lived. Of course I can take no money with me." She could not help sighing as she acknowledged the unwelcome truth. "But that does not say it was wrong to enjoy it while I could. I enjoyed it my own way."

Hals remembered Maso. Yes, she too had her way of things. He thought aloud,

"If God meant us all to be alike He would not have made us all so different."

"Hals," the old woman went on presently, "Onofria would have liked to tell me I should send for Don Ercole, only she was too cowardly. But it is customary. Let him come."

And he came, and One greater than he. And, with such turbid faith as Zia had, she accepted Him, as the guide and companion of the journey into the unknown, from which she shrank almost wholly because it was unknown.

CHAPTER II

DON ERCOLÈ was very wet. He shivered as he stumbled up the steps at his own door, and Giuseppa, who would have helped him if he had let her, threw up her hands and cried:

"Tutto bagnato! tutto bagnato! Sarà raffredato."

"Nothing! nothing!" he grunted, and would have waved away her threats of a chill, but both his hands were occupied leaning heavily on his two thick sticks.

Giuseppa had been wet herself. For she also had been to the funeral. It was seldom she went out, but the burial of the Duke's aunt was an occasion she felt imperative. Every gossip she had would have the advantage of her if she failed to see it for herself.

But she had returned twenty minutes ago, and had taken off what was wet. She now urged her master to lose no time in doing the same.

The whole *paese* had been at the funeral, and all the family and household from the palazzo. It was noticed that the Duca and Duchessa were beginning to show their age. The young Principessa was there. She had come over from Torre Marco a few days before; and Zia had been softened and grateful. She knew that Marotz did not wish to come to San Vito and had not ventured to ask for it. But as soon as they had let her know of Zia's state, the girl had

immediately laid aside her resolve and hastened to the old dying woman. Already there had been another stroke, "on the other side," Don Antonio said, but it had not reinstated Zia's mouth in the middle of her face.

Marotz sat close to her, holding both her hands in hers.

"I wish you could come too," said Zia, her voice odder than ever, and not always arriving, as it were, from the quarter one expected. "It would be some one from San Vito."

Marotz thought of her baby.

"I wish I could go with you. But I would have to come back to look after Piccolo."

"They all say he is *biondo*, like your father."

"Yes; and he is sweet-tempered like him. He always looks happy, and is never cross. Dear Zia!" And she bent her exquisite small head to kiss the shrunken old hands.

"I was always cross. But, Marotz, I *was* fond of you."

"You were not cross a bit. You used to pretend to be. Some people are always pretending not to be."

"San Vito always spoiled you: and your father and mother treated you like a grown-up woman as soon as you could speak. That was not customary when I was young. As for Onofria, she would not presume to be cross with the cat. So it seemed right that *some* one should scold you a little."

Marotz had quite understood, and probably Zia instinctively guessed it.

"Onofria gets tiresome," she complained presently. "She is always repenting, and it makes her

low-spirited. Of course she likes eating too much. What 's the use of making a fuss about it? As if any one in heaven had time to count her spoonfuls."

"Marotz," she asked in a very low tone, trying in vain to screw her head round a little, "are you unhappy? I could not help asking."

Marotz moved her own head so that Zia could see her easily.

"No, dear Zia. I am happy. I have Piccolo."

It seemed to her ungracious to have put it thus, and she added immediately:

"I have been happy all my life. Here, before I ever went away, there were all of you. At the Reparation I had Poor Sister as well—you were all mine still. Then I went away again, and I suffered; but even in suffering one can be happy somehow. And now I have Piccolo."

The old woman made a little movement, and her failing eyes grew more eager.

"Marotz, did you ever guess that I had been very unhappy? My husband was cruel. He ill-used me; and I only had one baby, that died next day. It was too wretched to stay here. But my husband was worse after it died. And——"

But she did not go on. He had dishonoured her by an affair with her own maid; and she had easily enough discovered it.

"Oh, well! he died himself, and when he was on his death-bed I said I had forgiven him."

After all, she would say no more. The great fault, greater than the personal ill-usage, she had never mentioned to any one all these years; and she could not bring herself to do so now. She had forgiven

him. For fifty years she had been brooding over his fault, but to speak of it to another person would be untrue to her promise of forgiveness!

Shut up alone in the grim old rooms, poor Zia had something else beside her money—the rankling memory of an injury she had borne in silence.

Marotz understood. Her gentle heart smote her.

"Forgive us too, dear Zia; we have n't been very good to you."

Zia, whose tough fibres were relaxed in the enervating weakness of swift decline, almost whimpered:

"*Che sciocchezza!* You did everything. . . ."

"Zia, Zia! doing is not so important as being. We might have *been* more. What would the favours God does us be worth if He were not Himself? No one did you any favours. You say we did enough. But did you feel we loved you enough?"

"That is another *stupidaggine*. Who could love an ugly old woman like me?"

"God could. . . ."

"Oh, *Iddio!* But He loves everybody," she said. What was universal could not, it seemed to her, be pleasantly particular too.

"Only because everybody means each single somebody in all the world," urged Marotz, her lovely sombre eyes full of her words. "He does not love us all simply in a lump. To Him the great ocean is not one big, vague, blue thing; each drop is separate to Him."

"If He loves me specially He must be peculiar," observed Zia.

But Zia was dead, and Don Ercole had buried her.

He shivered again as he peeled off his wet clothes, and his soul was colder than his body. Zia was just his own age, and her death upset him. He would have buried Hals, or even San Vito, more comfortably. And Zia and he had a taste in common, though they had never compared notes upon it, as other collectors are apt to do.

No new scruples were attacking him, but he felt chill physically, and a mental forlornness, like a chill, was disconcerting him.

He had never neglected any call of duty, except the call to be something higher than he was. Years ago there had come cholera to the *paese*, and it had never even occurred to him to run away, or stint his people of his attendance. There had more than once been small-pox and other very infectious diseases, and he had "assisted" those *moribondi* exactly the same as if there had been no risk to himself at all. Indeed, he had not thought much of it. Sometimes a summons would come to go and see a dying parishioner far up in the mountains, late at night, in bad weather, just as he was getting ready for bed or after he had gone there; and he had set off without delay, just as promptly as if the call had been to the palazzo or any other house close at hand.

He had given no scandal, and led always a decorous, moral life, giving prudent and decent counsel when asked, and occasionally without waiting to be asked. Stingy and grasping as he was, he had never overreached any one, and, though he had seldom given alms, he had seldom refused, for, indeed, he had been seldom asked.

One thing had been lacking. But had he suspected it—did he even suspect it now?

He had *done* respectably enough. As Marotz said, what was amiss was not what he had done or failed in doing, but what he had been and failed in being.

He hobbled down-stairs now and into his sitting-room, whose green walls were now dingier but not less raw. A clammy sweat beaded on them. And he grumbled to himself to see the big window open. The valley was full of cold rain, and one could see no Mongibello at the end of it.

He shut the window and turned to his *scrivania*, where he did his accounts, and where his money was locked up till he could take it down to the bank at Catania. Latterly he had done this less frequently; it was too far for him to walk now to the station at Piedimonte, and Attilio Speranza would not drive him there under three or four francs if he went on purpose. If he happened to be going on his own affairs he would take Don Ercole for a lira. Then there was the return railway fare, and he must buy something to eat at Catania. So he let small payments accumulate more than of old, and took them down when they were worth taking, as opportunity offered. He might have given the money to the Duke and got a cheque in exchange which could, perhaps, have been entrusted to the post. But Don Ercole did not like to talk to any one about his money, and would have been shy of letting San Vito know about it. Nor did he like asking favours. Moreover, he mistrusted the post, and even a cheque might go astray and cause trouble and discussion if not loss.

To-day he had been much irritated by the receipt

of a hundred lire in *notes*, which had been sent by post. True they were registered, but that seemed a very insufficient safeguard to Don Ercole.

The letter had arrived just as he was starting for the funeral, and had nearly caused him to be late. There was the receipt to sign, and he had been obliged to hobble back here and lock the notes up. All this wasted time; and Don Ercole was a punctual, deliberate man, who hated being hurried.

Then the *corriere* had been jocose, congratulating him on getting so many letters which were *raccomandate*. And this had annoyed the old miser strongly.

Altogether there were more than five hundred lire in the *scrivania*, and he must really get down to Catania as soon as possible.

He sat down by the *scrivania*, and slowly, as he did everything, unlocked it. He stamped one foot and then the other on the floor, for they were bloodless and cold, and his head felt hot and full; then he drew out the wooden supports for the flap of the desk and pulled it open to rest on them.

Presently Giuseppa came and knocked at the door. She had made some hot wine, with spice, and was determined he should drink it. She had had some herself, and it had created an agreeable sense of glow and warmth in her old inside. They were neither of them at all bibulous, but the present was an "occasion," and the wine was cheap and strong. Indeed, it cost nothing but the trouble of making, for the grapes grew in Don Ercole's own vineyard on the hill-side.

Giuseppa was a little deaf, and did not know if he had called out *Intrate* or no. So she went in. Her

master was bundled up before the *scrivania*, his head lolling on his big chest. The little drawers of the upper part of the *scrivania* were all pulled out, and everything was in confusion. One could see he had rummaged them one after the other in trembling, eager haste, for something he had not found, something he could never need again.

He had known instantly who had robbed him, and if they had examined his heart now that he was dead, they must certainly have found ARRIGO seared upon it. All the blood of his body had crowded fiercely into his head, where there was no room for it. It was boiling there, and must boil over or burst it, like a rush of steam to a place whence there is no valve.

As well as if with his starting eyes he had seen him, did he now see his scapegrace nephew rifling this private loved hoard with a smiling face, could he see him now leisurely though swiftly making off to Giarre with his loot.

"*Maladetto!*" he groaned; and, alas, that was the last word he ever uttered.

"Dead?" said Don Antonio when they had fetched him. "Of course he is dead—as dead as Ponzio Pilato." The comparison was not respectful, but even Giuseppa only felt that it was convincing. "One might have known that he would die without any *medico* to help him."

Don Antonio was irritated; to push economy so far was, he considered, unneighbourly. Had *he* been dying, he would have sent for Don Ercole.

CHAPTER III

MAROTZ went back to Torre Marco, and the weeks became months unnoticed, and almost unnoticed the months added themselves into years. Ancilla deliberately set herself from the earliest possible moment to spoil Piccolo, but he was incapable of being spoiled; and his mother did not mind.

She very seldom went to San Vito, but now and then they would come over to her, generally one at a time, though occasionally Hals and Lucia would be allowed to come together. She delighted in their coming; to be hospitable was a new and delicate pleasure to her, but their going did not depress her, for she never felt such absence as theirs to be separation.

"I quite agree with your idea," declared Hals once, when she had rather shyly explained this feeling of hers; "we will take Piccolo away with us. You will have him all the same. And Nonno would like to begin spoiling him at once."

Marotz laughed, but begged him not to try and be logical.

"You know you never were and it would not suit you a bit." They knew that she had told them of her adopted theory as to absence because she would not have them think of her as lonely in her gaunt castle when they were gone.

Nor was she lonely; neither did the dark old fortress-palace seem grim to her. How could it? Was not Piccolo there? And indeed she loved, beside him, every one in it.

"Ancilla," she said one day, "why do you not get married? I am sure you must have been asked."

"*Certo*, have I been asked! But one is not supposed to do all that stupid people ask one. One marries to improve one's position."

At this cheerfully worldly view of marriage Marotz laughed, and Ancilla added:

"When they suggest it I say to them, 'If you are better than the Signora Principessa I will marry you.' Thereupon they go away. *Poverini!* They are, after all, reasonable. Why should I leave your Excellency?"

"You need not necessarily leave me. You might marry some one here."

"Erennio, for instance!" cried Ancilla, mentioning the head gardener, who was nearly fifty and looked at least sixty. "I do not like widowers. And half the week he is prickly like a thistle; only on the *festa* does he shave himself."

Marotz protested that she had never intended to suggest Erennio.

"There are plenty of bachelors. Erennio was entirely your own idea. But I perceive you have been thinking of him."

"*Al contrario* it was he. Not every one is modest; as I told him. If I married into that family, I assured him, it would be Carluccio his son, so he had better not keep the idea before me."

Marotz laughed again, for Carluccio was as

handsome and attractive as his father was hard-featured and uncouth. Ancilla's tastes were evidently æsthetic.

"I call him Fico," she went on, "his father being Cardone. In the Scripture, your Excellency knows, it says one does not gather figs from thistles. Carluccio is the exception."

"Well, then, let it be Carluccio," said Marotz cheerfully, with the air of giving her consent to a proposal that had been urged upon her. "When may I congratulate him? You will not, I suppose, go and live with Erennio, all three together; that would be trying to his feelings, as he wants you himself."

"And have two husbands in the house at once! One to be talking when the other held his tongue. *Certo*, no. But your Excellency will not congratulate any one. My wedding-dress is still in the *filugello's* inside."

"Ah! then you have decided to be married in silk. Of course that will be my present. But you must give me a little notice. One would have to order it from Catania."

"Catania? No, no; da Parigi *al meno*."

Ancilla had, in truth, no intention of getting married, and it was the case that her suitors, who may have been as numerous as she implied, were dismissed with a rather haughty inquiry as to whether they considered themselves superior to the Principessa? But she did not dislike being chaffed on the subject.

Marotz did not think there were to be no more cakes and ale. Her own marriage had not engendered in her any apostolate of celibacy for others, or any

suspicion that marriage in general must be a peril too great for another woman to hazard.

On the contrary, she smoothed the simple course of true love for many of her youthful dependants, and in frequent instances exercised her charity, as is commonly done by the wealthy and the kind-hearted in the south, by providing the necessary small dowry for girls that might otherwise have had to wait over-long.

Every one at Torre Marco was probably aware of the shadow that had fallen across her own life, and Rodrigo di Toledo would be rash indeed if he ever ventured there aggressively, but none of her people thought of their Princess as shut up in a melancholy isolation. Melancholy it was not, and to them it naturally did not seem isolation. The world's axis stuck out quite as agreeably for them at Torre Marco as it could for any Bostonian at Boston. No one had ever suggested to them that their little town, perched on a spur of rock on the mountain-side, was *tetro*; indeed dulness was a northern word they were too uninstructed to know the meaning of. They had to work and sleep, and earn their frugal food and wine, and find time to laugh and dance a little, make love when time was, and pray a little; what leisure had they to be dull?

And why should Marotz be dull either? She also had plenty to do, and the interests of a good many people, besides her own, to occupy her, her own fair thoughts for equal company, and Piccolo, and Piccolo, and Piccolo.

CHAPTER IV

ANOTHER lady had once lived alone at Torre Marco: the widowed mother of San Vito's father, who went there as to a dower-house when her husband had died, and of this lady's sojourn Marotz loved to note the traces. A picture of her hung here, and showed a refined, high loveliness, though it was not the portrait of a girl; at San Vito was another that Marotz remembered, and had loved all her life: that was of the Duchessa as a bride, and was more beautiful in its youth and freshness, but not more interesting.

About the old rough castle brooded still the gentle traces of her vanished presence, as to some rooms clings the odour of *pot-pourri*. But most of all was this true of the grave and lovely garden that she had beautified with her care and devotion.

When Marotz first came to live at Torre Marco she had plenty to do softening the asperities of the long disused castle. For no one had lived here since the death of this great-grandmother nearly half-a-century before; San Vito's own mother, the only dowager since, having entered Religion at her husband's death.

It must not be imagined that Marotz dreamed of trying to make her stiff abode smart, or of filling it with the pretty fripperies one sees so often in England, oddly superimposed on faded stateliness. She brought no queer draperies, no brilliant chintzes, no

nick-nacks; she did not crowd the fine, if dimmed, old bits of furniture with photographs of every one she knew, or even try to bring indoors all the flowers of her garden. But she made it look habitable and inhabited, and she seemed to make light, and air, and warmth more at home there.

She loved flowers, but she loved them most where they grew, and enjoyed their brilliant company where it could last longest and where they looked loveliest to her, backed by their own green birthplace, and contrasted with the shadowed alleys, the carved marble, of her garden. There she spent hours with them; and, among them, like one of themselves, Piccolo grew to seem one of them.

The garden was big, and had exquisite views from a dozen different parts of it, over the wide valley that lay far beneath it; there were wells with arched well-heads, carved richly, of white marble; and here and there statues, mounted on classic bases like *cippi*; every border was edged with low marble balustrades and there were narrow tanks with a fountain or two, and twisted stairways of yellowish-white stone, leading from one level to another. There was a little temple on a mound, with a statue of a youthful faun, who would not smile lest he should laugh outright.

There were lengths of high stone wall, a blaze of purple when the bougainvillia thrust its million blossoms through the trellises that covered them. Against the dark background of cypress the poinsettias lit their scarlet fires, and big trees of hibiscus would hang out their myriad long-wicked lamps of flame. There were pergolas from which the bignonia hung its chains

of green and gold, and climbing acacias let their long brown seed-pods droop.

Azaleas spread wide their glossy dark fingers, and brakes of *canne*, yellow and palest primrose, scarlet, and maroon and orange-tawny.

Around the Judas-trees a carpet of royal purple would lie spread, like the trees' shadow; the feathery pale green of the pepper-trees hard by forbidding one to note that the Judas-tree itself was leafless.

There were immense *frangipani*, with enormous creamy blossoms of subtle though powerful fragrance; thickets of olive, of secular growth, with writhen trunks like grey dragons, and sad foliage, like trees stolen from a moonlit night; and broad-leaved datura hanging their huge white trumpets, filled with fragrance for music. Hedges of myrtle covered themselves with a miracle of summer snow, and groves of oranges filled the air with waxen odours, then hung themselves with tiny unlit green lanterns, hereafter to grow golden, like orbs for kings.

On Sundays Marotz let her garden gates stand open and her people shared its beauty with her, gracefully and gratefully.

Here Piccolo grew bigger, reflecting the flowers in his face.

It was true that he was like Hals, but rather in colouring and expression than in feature, for form and contour were southern. His hair, too, grew darker, and what had been almost yellow became ruddy-gold. It curled closely to his head; and the blue of his smiling eyes was that of sapphires, shadowing into deep hazel, whereas Hals had eyes whose blue was like gentian-flowers in the shadow of a rock.

As Piccolo grew older, his first resemblance to his mother's father became rarer, so that it would recur only occasionally.

He had no question to ask of life, but took it for granted smilingly, as if its pretty surface satisfied him, and suggested no hidden riddle, as to some quite young children it does.

Marotz was oddly grateful. She trembled lest he should bring to her, to solve, the surmises and misgivings that had clamoured for answers from herself. In her own childhood every fact and every object had stood in front of its long shadow, and the shadow absorbed her more than that which had cast it. She had never been able to glance at anything and see it, plainly, as it merely was: she had always considered of its coming and of its going, endowing it with what it would be, or abstracting what it had been.

To her no less a breath than God's moved every leaf that fluttered; every flower was a hint of greater loveliness, every fruitful vine an instalment of infinite bestowal. She could view nothing alone, or even as a complete whole, but simply as an exquisite part of something to be divined.

Thus her admiration became sacramental, and the grace that she received from all she saw was far deeper than the mere joy of seeing. Everything was a message, and the sender was too great for absorption in the thing sent.

Piccolo suspected no world beyond the garden, and the mountains that hovered above it, the broad valley over which it hung, and the other mountains beyond. He wondered of no causes, but seemed content to suppose everything he knew eternal.

He noticed everything but observed nothing; like a happy wild animal that has never had a foe, he pleased himself with all, and compared nothing with another. He drew no conclusions, but only pleasure, from all within his reach.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Piccolo was ten years old the Duca di San Vito died. He had been failing for a long time, and the idea of dying had grown familiar to him. It had not, indeed, grown welcome. To how few is it welcome. And San Vito had been always an active, vital person, to whom the notion of inevitable and final repose was not by any means restful. He liked acting and he hated thinking; how could he regard complacently the prospect of doing nothing further, but spending an expanse of time, so endless as to need a word of its own to describe its ceaseless duration, in immovable admiration and consideration?

He had no fear of death. His life, if not blameless, had been just and decent, and, in comparison with that of most men of his own family, exemplary. God, he had always understood, was by no means extreme to mark what was done amiss. Very likely he had snubbed his wife a little roughly, and talked down his son-in-law over loudly, but God had too much tact to overhear family bickerings which meant nothing. No one takes notice of these things, and, if obliged accidentally to assist at such little scenes, the well-bred person hardly admits even to himself that he is conscious of them. Long ago there might have been other matters, but they had all been confessed years since, and had not been repeated.

San Vito had no fear of hell, and as for purgatory that was merely an inevitable and temporary nuisance, like teething, only at a different period of one's existence. The idea of what was to follow it was almost more disconcerting.

He did *not* believe that he would be called upon to perform ecclesiastical music for ever on a harp; but he did suppose that the occupations provided would somehow be entirely of an ecclesiastical character: not so bad, perhaps, as a chronic sermon, an interminable mission, but something definitely religious, whereas his religion had always been the only indefinite thing about him. How could he help an instinctive shrinking from the prospect?

San Vito had no physical dread of death, which many brave people have, because their imagination is sensitive, which his was not.

The idea was unwelcome for the reasons that have been hinted at, and because it touched his pride. As Duca di San Vito he had been of considerable, though local, importance, and the manner of his life had fostered his sense of it. He was too intelligent to fancy he would have been equally important out in the big world, and not to be fully and disagreeably aware that in that greater world beyond this, he would be of no importance at all. He liked his own individuality, and felt that it must be swamped in the vast equality of heaven. The world, too, to which he was being summoned was a world of spirits, and spirits were less visible than shadows, less tangible than a breath; he had been aware of his own body, but had no cognisance of himself in any other capacity.

Nevertheless he had to die, and what was inevitable

he submitted to, without complaint or fuss. His life had been manly and, in its fashion, dignified; and his death would be manly and dignified too.

His temper had not improved with age, but it did improve towards the end, to Onofria's devout and grateful surprise. As he grew weaker he grew less overbearing, as if his overbearingness had been a part of his surplus strength and virility.

For several years before his death he had found himself gradually obliged to do less and less, and to entrust more to Hals, whom he found by no means so incapable as he had supposed. And with the increasing abdication of activity he had laid aside much of the irritability and impatience with which his activity had been so hotly seasoned.

He still went over, now and then, to Torre Marco, but at longer intervals, as the long ride became more fatiguing. Marotz, on the other hand, brought Piccolo—who was very tall for his age, but kept his old name—oftener to San Vito.

For his tenth birthday she had a *festa* among her people, and everybody from San Vito came over for it, San Vito insisting on going too.

"Marotz," he said the day after, "I was determined to come, but now I must go home."

She urged that he had better wait and rest. This time he had not been able to ride, but he said the carriage had tired him more.

"Not here; Marozzina! I shall soon have rest enough. This is my last journey."

He knew that one other was impending, but it would not be like him to speak of it more directly.

He had always spoiled her, and she was the only

person he had ever much caressed. He touched her caressingly now.

"Will you come too?" he asked her, and of course she said she would.

"I have a special reason," he went on; but he was almost shy of stating it. He had never been shy, but it was not easy to him to express what was in his mind.

"There will be a visitor," he said, and Marotz looked up surprised.

"I am going to die," he explained, "and it will be very soon now. If I were at home I would go to bed. No, no, don't ask me to go to bed now, here. For when I go I shall not get up any more. I should have gone to bed on Monday, but I was determined to come here and see Piccolo's *festa*. I should not wish to die away from San Vito. And it is a lack of education to die in some one else's house. One should be born at home and one should die at home. I was born at San Vito, and my father died there."

He paused, but Marotz saw he did not wish to be interrupted, and simply stroked his thin hand, out of which all the strength and brownness had faded.

Still he found it embarrassing to say what he wanted, and to no one but her could he have said it at all.

"One must die," he began again, "and there are certain things to do. Before I die the priest will have to come, and the doctor and . . ."

"And some one else," whispered Marotz.

He nodded.

"Yes. And He must be received properly. All the family should be there. Once, long ago, when

I was a *ragazzino*, the king—our king of the two Sicilies—came; and I remember all the family received him, and the men were all in new liveries; and He also is a King, and coming to my house, to visit me; He must be received accordingly. Is that not right?"

Marotz agreed. Nor did she try and teach the old man what sort of royalty His was whom he proposed to receive with royal state. People are different: it did not strike her that her own ideals were so necessarily superior that she must cut into this old and withered tree to engraft them there. She noted with respect the respect implied, and did not belittle it because it was not supernatural.

"So I want you to come, and Piccolo. And you and Hals will arrange it according to my instructions."

Just five weeks later he was buried. On his return to San Vito he did go at once to bed, and the doctor plainly told him he was right, the end must come soon. He might have lived a little longer if he had not gone to Torre Marco. That effort had suddenly overdrawn his small remaining balance of strength.

Onofria whimpered, and strange to say was not scolded for doing so. He was too weak now to scold any one, and all the courtesies she had admired in him as a young man, fifty years ago, seemed to have returned. But it made him seem strange to her: she had grown used to the older, rougher husband, and could scarcely recognise him in this passing shadow of an almost forgotten lover.

Hals carried out all the instructions he received as to the arrangements the dying Duke had spoken of. No one discussed them, they were simply obeyed.

The corridors were hung with magnificent old

tapestries, and at close intervals were placed huge candlesticks fitted with immense candles. On every alternate step of the grand staircase stood similar candelabra, some holding a single candle, some branched and supporting a group of smaller ones; very costly, though ancient, carpets covered the floors, and these were strewn with bruised bay leaves and showers of orange blossoms; there were no other flowers, though here and there, on temporary altars, stood reliquaries of gold and silver from the chapel. Between the candelabra were posted members of the great household, all the men in liveries, all the women, opposite, in black dresses and veils, as if for an audience with the Pope.

Each had borne a tall torch, and the women flung bay leaves and orange flowers, as the procession came along.

In front came the confraternity, clad in their monk-like habits; then the *assistenti* from the church, then the priests, the *parocco* holding the Blessed Sacrament, while over it was borne on silver poles a canopy of embroidered gold tissue.

In San Vito's room an altar was arranged, very simple but very magnificent, and on this the pyx was set while they sang the *Tantum Ergo*.

Down in the *paese* the bells rang slowly, and all along the street to the castello the people knelt. One could see them from the windows of the dying man's room.

It was an exquisite clean morning of early October, fresh and brilliant, with the first smell of autumn in the air.

Close to the great bed knelt Onofria, weeping noise-

lessly, a little behind her Hals and Lucia, Marotz and Piccolo somewhat nearer the altar and further from the bed.

The priest aspersed the room, and a cleric said the Confiteor; then the Sacred Host was carried to the dying man, who received it with a feudal reverence. He had always been loyal.

CHAPTER VI

From that day a change was perceptible in Piccolo. He suddenly seemed to stand still and look life in the face, as if searching there for meanings he had never before suspected.

He was as sensible as ever of the beauty to be seen, but he had misgiving of a larger beauty hinted. Until now all had been a picture with no remote perspective and with no shadow: but he began to guess at distances that might be nobler than anything at hand, at shadowed mysteries that might be lovelier than the sunshine on mere flowers within his reach. Hitherto he had been content to glance at everything as at a familiar face that could only smile at him; now he perceived that it might be a mask, hiding features, unknown to him, on which a frown might come. Especially he became aware of movement where before all had seemed permanent and almost stationary; life was not, he discovered, a tableau, but a procession, and moved onward to changing music. Whither? There was a goal that lay in a blue mystery of distance which advance must disclose and unveil. Beyond the mountain that had seemed but the outward wall of his garden lay further valleys, and perhaps higher mountains, and things greater, it might be, than themselves.

"Where does the river come from?" he asked Marotz.

"From little springs far up in the hills."

"And where does it go to?"

"To the sea."

He had heard often of the sea, which was indeed not far off, but hitherto it had been a word of no meaning, and he had not concerned himself with it. He did not ask about it now, but wondered for himself.

Marotz perceived the change in him at once, and, in a way, her heart fell. Now would come the questions she had been so gladly spared. But he kept his questions for himself; and she soon came to wish that he would put them to her. She knew they had come, and his silence concerning them had the effect of reserve. They stood for ever in his eyes like the shadows of great mountains in a little lake. No doubt he became more beautiful, but it was with a wholly different beauty. He lost all resemblance to a faun, though he grew more than ever like an exquisite classic statue. His close curling ruddy-brown hair, his exquisitely formed features, his full, sensuous lips were all Greek enough; but in his eyes there grew an expression that was not at all that of some happy, superficial creature of the woods and fields. Some statues of Antinous, indeed, there are, which owe their pathos, if not their beauty, to much the same expression. It is misgiving and wonderment, the awakening to something before to-day and something after, question of yesterday and doubt of to-morrow; almost a shudder. Life, the deep eyes saw, was not a picture but a book, written in more than one language, with many chapters and an end. To see the picture is easy, to read the book needs deeper attention, learning of the tongues in which its meanings

are folded, a sense of connection, sympathy. The figures in the picture began to move, and their expression also changed; action succeeded to mere position, and their smile broke into speech of varied tone. He learned that there is other water than that of marbled tanks, with movement more significant than the play of fountains, where the same water rises for ever to the same height and falls back again to the level whence it came. Above all there was the sea, which swallows all the rivers of the hills and never overflows.

Only now did he seem to grow aware of change, the sadder name of motion, in others and in himself. Children, he perceived at last, did not keep their place as children, but outgrew it, as he himself had done suddenly. Nor would anything turn back. The pleasantest game becomes too small for the player, and, if persisted in, an affectation. The prettiest toy must look foolish if held too long.

Nor can the grown-up people hold their place. They, also, he now saw, were one and all being pushed forward. And the old, whither were they being urged? To age itself something succeeds, age itself having no patent of rest from change. Beyond it also he learned there was a further stage. Nonno, his mother's grandsire, had moved to it. What was it?

Never for a moment did he conclude it to be merely nothing: it also must be something, like infancy and childhood, boyhood, manhood, and old age. But what? Why could it not be seen? Why was it scarce spoken of, and mentioned in tones so low and reverent? Where was it?

"Where is Nonno?" he asked his mother, breaking his habitual silence of question.

"He has gone to God."

"But God is everywhere." He asked no more and went away. Nonno he supposed was everywhere also.

"God," he said to her another day, not as interrogating but reasoning to a point divined, "made everything, and He loves it all."

She said, "Yes," and he went on,

"Me also?"

"He loves every leaf and blade of grass, and all the small living creatures whom He feeds and cares for."

"And so they do what pleases Him in return."

Marotz sighed.

"Every tree and fruit is just what He intended; each occupies exactly its desired place and carries out its little part in His great plan."

"But men?"

She told him that men failed often to be what they were meant to be; that the noble part they might play was too high for some of them.

"That," he said, "is shameful. I will not let any tree put *me* to shame."

CHAPTER VII

ONE morning, when Piccolo was eleven years old, Marotz was in her garden giving her daily greetings to her trees and flowers. She had not the fulsome talk about any of these things that is so common in the north, but her love of them, as of animals, was much greater than is common in the south. She herself was uncommon, and is not presented as a southern type; indeed some pains have been taken to show that there were strains running through her rather complex nature which never came from Sicily.

Marotz never said she could not live without flowers; she could and did live without things far more important to her; nor did she profess to be able to go without food more easily than without flowers, as one hears so many people declare who ply, none the less, an excellent knife and fork. Her character was too grave for affectations, almost too grave for prettinesses. She made no loud protestation of belief that flowers can feel, and then cut them off by the ankles and stand them on the table in a vase. Nor did she so love animals as to hate men for their sake, and be ready to inflict disproportionate punishment on those, more ignorant than herself, of coarser fibre, and less sensitive compassion, who might be less considerate in their treatment, and perhaps less sparing in their use. I have in England seen one small pony dragging a

lumbering chaise in which were seated four or five stout ladies, all breathing out threatenings and slaughter against some wicked poor peasant who had filled his cart over-full to take his goods to market; but none of the indignant party got out to ease their own pony as he pulled his load of virtue up the hill.

Nevertheless Marotz did love the small living creatures whose speech we do not know; their observing Father was her own, and they were her brothers as they were to the sweet Poor Man of Assisi. And she loved her flowers too, drawing pleasure from their fragrant company, and enjoying it most where, if they *could* feel, they must be most happy.

Here in her garden one morning she walked and looked at them, watching, too, the little bright lizards that scarcely found it necessary to dart up the wall as she came by. When she spoke they listened, and found nothing startling in her peaceful voice. But when Ancilla came along the marble walk in search of her mistress they slid out of sight into impossible-seeming crannies.

"Signora Principessa, there is a Signore."

Visitors were so rare at Torre Marco that Ancilla was quite elated. She tendered a card on which Marotz read the name of the Principe di Positano.

"Show him the way out here," said Marotz, turning towards the castle.

Presently she sat down and waited, her thoughts going back twelve years to the night of the great palace ball when she had first heard Strauss, the echo of whose master-violin beat loudly in long-closed chambers of memory.

As Don Fabio di Maiori came to meet her, through

the marbled alleys of her garden, she thought he looked but little changed and little older. She had risen, and went towards him, Ancilla departing as soon as she and her guest were near enough to speak.

She gave him her hand, and he too told himself that no change had impaired her beauty. At seventeen she had looked older than her age; no one would now have wasted time in debating what her age might be. She was certainly a woman, but no grace of girlhood had left her, and each year had only deepened the charm of her peculiar loveliness. Her figure was finer than ever, though slight still. He thought that she seemed taller than as he had remembered her, and perhaps she really was so.

"How strange it is to meet again," she said frankly.

"Some strange things are unpleasant," he observed, smiling.

"But not this. Angels, I hope, are commoner unawares at Torre Marco than the visitors we know of."

They both laughed, and he felt a slight sense of relief; he had half-feared that these strange years might have made her solemn.

"But how did you come? How did you find your way? Did you go first to San Vito?"

"No. I hope they are all well there? But I came to see you."

When Don Rodrigo di Toledo had come to her she had known at once why. But this was different. She could not think of herself now as of one whom any one would seek to woo.

"I suppose you were somewhere near. People come more to Sicily nowadays."

"I was n't very near. I am First Secretary of Embassy in London."

"Oh, so you are used to talking English now. It is my grandmother tongue! Father and I used to talk it often when I was at home."

"Yes, I know. It is my grandmother tongue also. You remember, perhaps, that my father was also in diplomacy and married an Austrian lady whose father had been an ambassador and was married to an Englishwoman."

"I remember quite well. We talked of it the night of that ball at the palace when you told me about the Reparation Sisters."

"I certainly should not have told you about them had I known it would lead to your going away and joining them."

He was sitting by her side on a huge carven seat of marble, not unlike a classic sofa. Now he got up and stood in front of her, bareheaded, with little flickers of light falling on his face now and then as he moved. Over the seat a huge *frangipani* rose up, and under it a pepper-tree stretched out its feathery branches.

"Why not?"

Her tone was a little dangerous, as if she had meant why should *he* disapprove what her parents had allowed.

"I wanted you to do something else."

Of course she understood then: his manner was too direct for mistake. Still, she thought of it merely as a matter long past.

"It would have made no difference had you known," he continued. "But it was so."

"No," she answered, "it would have made no dif-

ference then, even if I had known. But you knew I did not know?"

"I wondered. I had tried to show you what I felt. But I am not glib, and I was only one-and-twenty then, and still less ready at saying all I meant. As you say, it would have been of no use, no matter how eloquent and explicit one had been!"

So she had had two lovers. Rodrigo she had known as one almost from her first meeting with him—nay, not a lover but a wooer.

CHAPTER VIII

SUPPOSING he *had* spoken? If it would have made no difference, at the time, in her resolution of entering the Reparation as a postulant, would it have made any afterwards? Would her answer to Rodrigo, when he came to seek her at San Vito, have been different or the same? She knew now that her maiden meditations had in truth been fancy-free. She had not been in love, though most surely she would have learned to love had he who offered love been willing to give it, been able to teach it. Might it all have flowed in a different course had this other lover been suspected? Might *he* have been the alternative, instead of Rodrigo, to the cloister life to which she had found herself unbidden? Perhaps: but it was a net-work of supposition too tangled to unravel now.

She looked up and her eyes met his.

"I was stunned when I heard you were going to the Convent of the Reparation as a postulant," he said. "But I don't think I was wholly surprised. It was quite what you seemed to be able to do. And I tried to put aside all thought of you that might be selfish, to keep your memory in my heart as a relic, to be venerated but not touched."

A dazzle of tears crept into her eyes, as years ago, on that night of early summer when the great doors had been flung wide and the two sovereigns had stood

silent to receive the homage of their guests. She had tasted the abasing bitterness of knowing herself unloved, where love had been vowed and was her due: now, to find she had been loved where no love had been, as she thought, hinted, and where it was a free gift, unowed! All her life she had been hungry for love, even that of the old and unsightly, the poor and the unlovable.

"Then," he went on, with a sadness that was reproachful, though intending no reproach, "I heard you were to be married. The Ambassadors told me: she had never told me you had left the convent, and I did not know. But she announced your engagement triumphantly and I saw that she knew what I had wished. There was nothing to complain of. Your right to choose was free. I did not like him, but it was unlikely that I should, and his faults, as I suspected them, marriage should have cured. I never doubted that such a marriage would, in fact, cure them."

Her perfect face was lifted to his, and in his heart he cursed the miscreant whom even she could not lift to herself and mend. To what purpose, he asked bitterly, had been this waste? Such a pearl to have been trampled beneath such swine-feet; it stirred his deep and fervent spirit to rage.

"At the moment of your marriage," he continued, "I was on the way to China, where I had obtained Second Secretaryship. And I was there five years; five more in Washington, then in St. Petersburg for nearly two, and now I am First Secretary in London. Do you understand why I come only now?"

"Only now?" Her eyes quivered, and she felt it hard to say even those two little words.

"Yes. Only now. I should have been here years ago if I had known what I know now. Only the other day I learned that your marriage had been annulled."

She too rose and stood close to him.

"It has not been annulled," she said simply. "There never was any marriage."

At her first words he grew pale, and at her second he reddened angrily. Of what new villainy was he hearing? Was this the explanation of her hidden life here among the mountains?

"Sit down," she said, sinking down herself, "and I will try and tell you."

And in her quiet, plain voice she did somehow tell him all.

"You see our marriage was a sham," she concluded, "and my father made him understand, what indeed he knew already from me, that any attempt on his part to enforce it, any pretence of compelling me to go back to him, would be met by an appeal to the Pope, and that it was exceedingly likely that in such a case the Pope *would* annul the marriage. He has left me alone and nothing has ever been done."

"Legally, then, he is still your husband?"

"I have no husband. What the law would say if it had been invoked is undecided; for no one has appealed to it."

"I came here to ask you to be my wife," he said.

They sat silent. She had known it before he spoke. Would he say anything further, and destroy the great image of him that had risen in her heart? She was not asking that of herself: it did not even

occur to her; the image was too securely enshrined, though in truth he had said too much even already.

After a long while he spoke again.

"Principessa di Torre Marco, even if this had not been I should have come in vain. I must have half forgotten you."

She turned proud eyes on him, eyes proud of him as of herself.

"Yes," she said simply, "you could have known that whatever voice annulled my marriage, there is something higher than logic; though I had got no husband by my false marriage I had given myself as a wife, and only death can retract such a gift."

It was so. And he knew that whatever legal freedom had been given her, she would hold herself married, in the very act of denying, as she did deny, the reality of her marriage. Neither did he complain of this one-sided logic. Now he had seen her again he could not wish to take anything from her, even though it should have made her his. He would rather go away, as he must go, and leave her Marotz, than take her with him even though she should have been free to go.

Nor would he ask her what might have been her answer had she been free every way. He hoped he knew, and he could not wish that she would be willing to say. Nothing could rob him of what she was. Why should he half rob himself?

Through the shaded alleys of the sunlit garden a boy came lightly, and at the sound of his footsteps they both turned to look at him.

"This is Piccolo," said Marotz.

"Piccolo!" protested her visitor, as the tall boy drew near.

Don Fabio sought in vain for any trace of his father in the son. There was not much even of his mother. Except that they were deep and silent his eyes were not hers, nor the ruddy-brown hair close-curved about his smooth white temples; only the exquisite small ears, like pink shells, were like those of Marotz. The lips, sensuous and deeply carmine, were quite unlike those of his father, which were thin and cold.

Marotz told him who was their visitor, and Don Fabio half-guiltily expected to see a Telemachus glance of suspicion in the boy's inquiring eyes. But there was none. He came and leant against the young man, holding his hand still, and his face spoke only of courteous welcome.

Certainly he was unlike Marotz, but he was entirely worthy of her. Fabio di Maiori thought he had never seen anything more beautiful or more noble. It was teasing to the imagination to wonder what statue had come to life in him.

Piccolo looked the young prince full in the eyes, with a bold, but not rude scrutiny.

"Are you come to stay?" he asked, playing with one of his hands.

Don Fabio laughed quietly.

"I am afraid not."

"I hoped you were," the boy said, with evident disappointment.

"At all events I appreciate your hospitality."

The young man looked into the boy's face, and drawing it nearer, kissed it. He could see no reflection there of Marotz, beautiful as the face was.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN their guest had gone away, Piccolo said again, "I wish he could have stayed."

And something in his mother's heart echoed to the wish. The sunlight in the garden fell as bright, but it fell colder. Now that Fabio di Maiori had gone, Torre Marco seemed less inhabited, and yet he had been there only half a day. In the big rooms of the old castle his voice had sounded cheerfully, and at luncheon he and Piccolo had laughed together till the servants nearly laughed too.

Afterwards he had said to Marotz:

"Piccolo is glorious. But I cannot think of him as your son. I looked into his face, as into a mirror, to see you there; but he does n't even remind me of you. And he is so big, one cannot believe you are his mother."

"Of course he is big; he is eleven years old and I am over twenty-nine. He will be a giant."

"He will not be anything so stupid. You see—he will stop growing exactly at the right moment."

But Don Fabio was gone, and Piccolo missed him. When the young prince rode away, down the road to Paterno, the boy slid down the hill-side through the hibiscus and *fichi d'India*, and came out upon the zigzagging road a mile from the *paese*. There he sat

down casually, and had been there five minutes before the prince appeared around the corner.

Then they both laughed, and Piccolo climbed up the wall and told his friend to ride up close.

"Good-bye!" he said, drawing his arm round the young man's neck.

"Good-bye, Piccolo."

"Don Fabio?"

"Well, Piccolo?"

"Will you come back?"

"If possible."

"Promise!"

"I do promise. But, Piccolo, it may never be possible, or it may be possible only after a long time."

Then he rode away, down the steep, turning road, and Piccolo scrambled home through the steeper thicket.

Next morning Marotz sat again in her garden, on the seat where Don Fabio and she had sat yesterday, which seemed far away and belonging already to a quite distant past, like the night of the great palace ball. Indeed, the echo of his voice yesterday was inseparable from the echoes of the music on that night. And yet how clearly, as if he were speaking still, did she hear still, rather than remember, every tone of his voice and every word that he had said.

It seemed almost as if Ancilla must come out presently and say that he was there. But Piccolo came instead, and stood opposite her where Don Fabio had stood, with the same flickering lights glancing down through the shade, upon his face.

"May I ask something?" he inquired in a low voice, looking behind her among the trees.

Her heart sank, but she bade him ask whatever he wished to know.

"Are you a widow?"

"No, my son."

"Then my father is alive?"

She nodded the response she could scarcely get her tongue to frame.

She waited for further questions, but what came was not what she had feared and expected.

"Is he like Don Fabio di Maiori?"

"No, my son."

He picked a leaf from the pepper-tree, off the bough he had pulled down and was almost leaning on, and flung it lightly into the marble tank opposite the seat, and remained for a moment thoughtfully silent.

"Nobody could be *better* than Don Fabio," he said at last.

"He is a good man," she assented gravely.

"I love him already," declared the boy. "You have known him a long while—before I was born. Do you love him too?"

Then Marotz laughed and answered cheerfully,

"It is not good manners for ladies to say that they love gentlemen."

"Good manners! I thought you loved everything."

"Ah, well! In that sense——"

But Piccolo was annoyed.

"I thought," he said impatiently, "you were going to answer me. *He* would have answered if I had asked him."

"I hope, Piccolo," she suggested, still laughing a little, "that you are not going to ask all the gentlemen who come here if they love me."

"All the gentlemen!" he retorted with continued impatience. "He is the only one."

And he let go of the bough and stalked away with offended dignity.

Marotz sat still, and listened to the echo of his parting shot. "He is the only one." A small brown lizard came gingerly along the marble edge of the tank, and twisted his head inquisitively to look at her. But she was, he knew already, quite harmless, and was not, he perceived, even looking at him.

How short those twelve years seemed since the night when Fabio and she had sat together in the balcony looking out over that other garden which the moonlight and the black shadows had divided between them. It was impossible to keep apart the two meetings—that of yesterday, and that night of music and dancing. He was entirely the same, and what he had said belonged as it were to both. Nor was she altogether changed. The long pause of a dozen years, for the most part so silent and so calm, had not hurried her away from herself, as would have been the case if her life had been different.

She would not call herself a girl, but she was a girl still, though a woman too, much simpler, much fresher, than most girls half-a-dozen years younger.

"Nobody could be better than Don Fabio," Piccolo had declared, and she had no care to contradict him. "He is the only one."

She turned her head and looked along the flagged path by which he had come, and saw him coming, as she had seen him yesterday, but she knew he could not come. She did not even know he had promised, if ever it should be possible, to come back.

CHAPTER X

THE change in Piccolo of which mention was made a chapter or two back, that change that began with Nonno's death, did not, of course, come all at once, but it grew steadily. And Marotz felt, as well as noticed, it. He had acquired a new sense, the sense of all things spiritual.

Oddly, and indeed sadly, it did not join him more to her, but seemed to part him. With it there came a sort of reserve, as if he had things he could not share, even with her. She knew he did not love her less, but his love was deeper and became almost a part of his reserve; and all his love was no longer hers, but was given beyond her to something greater than herself.

He had learned to pray, as few do learn, and he was clad in his prayers as in a garment; it became an atmosphere, almost a cloud, though golden, in which he moved higher. He prayed as he breathed, and with the same unconsciousness. She watched him, and she saw that he was in love, and she knew with Whom. Everything else was a mere distraction. And yet he grew more wilful, or more impatient of interference. He could not bear to be called aside from the lonely company he had learned to keep.

He reminded her of things she had read, of some of the saints, who seemed marked out for sanctity in

earliest boyhood: not by things he said, for he was most silent concerning that which concerned him most, but by himself; his beauty was crowned by a light that was like a halo.

"Certainly," Hals admitted to Lucia after one of their visits to Torre Marco, "he is not like any other boy. But how could you expect it? Could Marotz possibly have a son in the least like anybody else's son? It is a wonderful instance of restraint on her part that he has not wings."

"Without wings he may fly away," declared his grandmother.

"Oh! You mean he may disappear into a monastery. He will probably do something more original."

And he did.

When he was fifteen he disappeared. Without sounding a note of warning he slipped away from Torre Marco, and the next they heard of him was that he was preaching through the mountains. Marotz was at San Vito, whither she had for the first time since he was a baby gone alone, he having asked her to let him remain at home.

"Of course, my son, if you wish it. Pahals and Maluccia (his names for her parents) will come back with me. They will not see you quite so soon, that is all."

Of herself she said nothing.

When she got into the carriage to start for San Vito he followed her, and took her into his arms, which were already almost like a man's. If he really was not going to be a giant he would have to stop growing soon. Had he been in the least like her, he would have looked much more like her brother than her son.

"Good-bye, dearest," he said; "are you sure you do not mind going alone? Are you sure you are able to make such a big journey all by yourself?"

They laughed, for the journey would only take three hours, and she had two men and Ancilla to look after her.

"Don't you think I can be trusted not to run away?" she added, and wondered why he reddened a little. Of his "running away" she never thought. He sighed, and the absorbed, almost absent expression she had grown used to see in his face was on it again.

"I can only do it alone," he said in a low voice, so much as if he were speaking to himself that she forbore to ask him what it was she could not help him to do. She knew that every heart of man, even her son's, must be a world to itself that even the dearest we have cannot trespass into. It was part of her great nobility to be wholly free from that maternal jealousy that can only seem interference.

"Good-bye," he said again, "I must not keep you all day. Dearest! we can never be far apart, can we, wherever you go, or wherever I may be?"

Her own doctrine driven home, she felt.

"No, my son. Always together, wherever we either of us may be."

He held her closer to him and kissed her; then, smiling, jumped out of the carriage and stood to watch it go.

They told her afterwards that he spent all that day alone in the little chapel of the castle; and towards evening they found that he had gone.

On the third day Marotz received a brief note from

him, telling in a few sentences what he had done. He was going from one *paese* of the mountains to another, preaching to the peasants, who listened to him attentively. And the rumours of his preaching came to San Vito almost as soon as his letter, but the rumours were more full. Crowds of the country folk gathered together wherever he came, and at the end of each sermon, which was always out of doors, he called on them to come with him to the church and go to confession. The confessionals were besieged with long strings of penitents, and all the priests in each village were busy till late at night.

Day by day the rumours grew louder, and the people from far distant places went off to listen to him. No one, it was declared, had ever preached like him: his words fell like flames among the crowds who pressed about him, and set their hearts on fire. The hardened old and the careless young were alike set on fire. No one doubted of his being a saint. No mission had ever produced such effects so long as any one could remember. People followed him through the mountains, for no one knew where he would appear next, and from San Vito also many went off to hear him.

Onofria, very old now, heard it all from the Prioressa, who was nearly as old, and from scores of other informants. Prioressa doubted if the bishop would approve, and Onofria herself felt uncomfortable. A saint among the San Vito was a great deal more astounding than Saul could ever have been among the prophets. The men of the San Vito had followed a line peculiarly unlikely to prepare her mind for this perplexing departure.

"Do you think the bishop will be offended?" she queried.

"If he is like the bishops in the *Lives of the Saints*, of course he will be offended," Hals assured her.

But the bishop apparently did not mind. No doubt he was told all about it, but he said nothing.

"Had you not better write to him," Onofria suggested to Marotz, "and explain that you knew nothing about it?"

But Marotz stoutly refused to do anything of the kind.

"If the bishop disapproves he can say so," she declared, "but the priests all say that immense good is being done; and what does it matter who does it? The bishop is a saint himself, they say, and why should he want to quench smoking flax?"

Onofria did not venture to say that Prioressa had pleasantly suggested that it was perhaps Beelzebub, and any devils apparently cast out might be cast out by the prince of devils, a work of supererogation to which she conceived that potentate to be generally much addicted. In truth the old Duchess had been rather offended herself at the hypothesis, not on the ground of its improbability, but as savouring of a liberty; devils were not to be associated with the Casa San Vito by a sort of dependant, whether saints were much in its line or not.

"For my part," said Hals, "I shall go and hear him."

Onofria visibly jumped. And Lucia was surprised too.

Marotz looked at him and saw that he was in earnest.

"May I go with you?" she asked.

"Of course."

It was, in fact, for her sake that he had said it.

"But you know," he added, "it will be rather a difficult matter, for no one knows where he will be next."

"A wild-goose chase," observed Onofria, on whom a flimsy corner of Zia's mantle had fallen.

"All we can do," said Hals, "is to find out where he preached last, and go there and follow him."

CHAPTER XI

THREE nights after this they did find him.

Outside one of the little hill-towns, on a sort of platform of rock, thinly covered with shallow earth and short grass, stood an ancient sanctuary of the Madonna, in front of which a crowd sat listening. The chapel shone ghostly white in the full light of a great moon, and the same cold radiance fell full on the face of the lad who was about to preach. As Hals and Marotz drew near the edge of the crowd, themselves in the dark shadow of a group of olive-trees, there was no sound but that of the night. Yet every one was listening.

Near the front of the chapel was a statue of God's great Mother, holding her Divine Child out almost at arms' length, as offering him to the worship of her other, so different, children. Against the pedestal of this the lad leant, his eyes bent downward thoughtfully. He was so tall that his head almost touched one of the child's marble feet. Then he moved a step forward and began to speak. Marotz and her father knew well how beautiful his voice had always been, and they were not now surprised at its subtle and sweet inflection, its exquisite sympathy and refinement. But it surprised them to find how thoroughly it was his servant, and what a powerful servant it was. He did not seem to speak loudly, certainly he

never shouted, but he was clearly audible, and no one stood farther from him than they. Even when he spoke in his lowest, most earnest tones, every syllable came full and clear, and every shade of inflection was perceptible.

As they listened and as they watched, they might have wondered at his power and effect, for he used scarcely any action, and what he did employ was inevitable and involuntary; whereas they knew that his audience was accustomed to associate all ideas of eloquence with fervid gesture, intense declamation, and a passion of illustrative, explanatory action. And yet they did not wonder. For the weapon he wielded was more powerful than either eloquence or the visible appeal of gesture. He said nothing but what he could not help saying because he felt it passionately. But it was himself, rather than his words, that smote the hearts of his hearers.

He began with no text, and he began abruptly, with no preacher's tag of fraternity.

"If the night could hear me," he said, "I would not speak to it. If the mountains leaning over us could catch my words, far up yonder in the dark, I would not bid them listen. There is no need that I should waken their echoes to repeat my message, or rouse the flowers from their fragrant sleep to lift their heads and attend to me. No nightmare tramples through their lovely dreams. Should the night-bird draw to me, there is nought for me to tell him. Could the olives, clinging to the steep, fold their silver tongues and cease from whispering to hearken, there is nothing I could teach them. Nor, if I could kneel upon some rock beside the great ocean, where he pants

in sleep, his huge voice sunk to a soft sighing, would there be ought for me to bid him heed.

"St. Francis gathered the birds about him, and they say he preached to them. But he had no need. Only he was fain to tell them of his love, as other lovers have told it to the brooks and trees, and they rose with it in their echoing ears, and sang it to the stars.

"Look at them! See how the night has set her jewels in her hair: millions upon millions of jewels fallen from the lap of God. Can I tell *them* anything? Can I teach one of them to shine more bright; does the least of them wander from his course, or turn aside from the path God set him at the first? Does the sun loiter in his rising, or the moon refuse her going down?

"In all the boundless fields of heaven one thing only fails. What is failure? To do less than what was meant, or to do otherwise. Each sand that helps to make the yellow girdle round the sea, or unseen to pave her deepest floor, each worm that weaves her silken arras ere she dies, each leaf that whispers to the night, each gale that trumpets 'God'—each has succeeded. None has ever failed. Only Man, made in God's image—only he has twisted the Divine purpose and ruined the Divine likeness.

"Where is it? What have you done with it? How are you now, to-night, like to Him? Which of you remains like to Him? Who would dare the blasphemy of saying he is like to Him? Take what is best in you, your love, is it like His love? As a parody degrades the poetry it mocks, so does that you call your love outrage the name God says is His.

"What have you done with God? how have you trampled His image in the slough of sin, and twisted the Divine likeness to a devilish caricature? If I lie, stand up and tell me: speak out and say, 'I am like God, and His features can be seen in me, His character is stamped upon my face and soul, His voice speaks through my lips, His fragrance clings about my garments, and His law is illustrated in my life.'"

He paused and leant back against the pedestal of the statue.

"None will so blaspheme. Men are liars, but they durst not lie like that. They are dull words, mine, but that at least that I have said is true. 'I repent me,' cried God, 'that I created man.' What must man have been already? We know what he was. When God had finished all His work He declared that it was very good. But man had not begun his, then. He soon began. It is true woman went first, but it was his shame that he followed her instead of sternly forbidding her. In place of showing her the meanness of her inquisitiveness, the vulgar prurience of her vanity, he fell into the infection of both. And so he turned from eternal truth to incarnate falsehood, and made God a liar rather than not believe the flattery of Satan's promises. In his bestial ignorance of what was good and what evil, he believed the masker's hissed promises, and was fool-brave to disregard the plain threat of Him who wore no disguise. Vain as his wife, inquisitive, as mean women and womanish men have ever been since, he itched for the knowledge of good and evil, not because it was knowledge but because it was a secret, because it was withheld, not because it was better than the

things given. He ate of the fruit that should give it him, which God had told him should be the seed of death; for Satan had laughed scornfully: 'Ye shall *not* surely die. But God knoweth that if ye eat of it ye shall be like Him and know all things—good and evil.' So that out of paltry jealousy God had forbidden them to eat, the prohibition was a cunning trick to keep His supremacy, a cheat's wily fence against rivals. And Adam believed this, and ate the fruit with that blasphemy to sauce it. For not only by rough words of disrespect is God blasphemed, but by those who credit lies which are a treason against His Majesty. His disobedience was a mere rebellion, but the motive of it was a filthy insult spat into the face of the King. Adamo——"

A fierce hiss interrupted the speaker, instantly taken up by others, till the whole crowd was hissing and cursing.

"Scelerato! A basso Adamo! All' inferno! Scroccone." The men jumped up, snapped their fingers, spat, stamped, hissed between their teeth, and piled insult upon insult on the unresisting head of Adam. Would that he were there! Soon would they pull him to pieces, or string him up to a tree and beat him with thorny sticks, or trample him into a pulp, like grapes in a wine-press. Scelerato! Infame!

Piccolo leant back against the pedestal of the statue, a sombre smile just parting his full curved lips. Then he again stepped forward and struck the palms of his hands together sharply, as if he were the master in a village school, and the hubbub boiled over into a sputtering silence.

"You are too late," he said coldly; "Padre Nostro

Adamo is a saint in heaven these eighteen centuries and a half. He committed one foul sin, but God was not like you. He gave him a thousand years to repent of it in, and during all those thousand years—more than half as long as all the time that has passed since Christ died for us—Adam repented. Which of you has only one sin to repent of? and which of you for a thousand sins has done penance for a thousand hours? Through the lowly gate of sorrow for his fault Adam crept back into the friendship of the Friend he had been false to.

“But, see first what his other friend had done for him, who had bidden him eat and know all things. The first fruit of his new knowledge was shame. He had never been ashamed before, though he was but a man and had talked with God face to face. Sin taught him shame, as it would teach you too, if you were not shameless. And his next proof of knowing all things was that he thought he could hide from God behind the thickets of his garden! That is how the liar, who had taught him to believe God untrue, fulfilled his promise. How does he with you? He offers you happiness and he gives you a filthy pleasure that brands you with its scar. He promises you a *soldo* and disinherits you of a kingdom. But he could not, if you were not willing. To each of you God has given the key of his own citadel, not to him; but, because you long that he should take it, you fling him out the key. The devil can damn no one; it is men who damn themselves. ‘Tempt us,’ you cry to him; ‘give us something! Have you nothing for us? No wicked gain, no swine-pleasure?’ And he sees what he has, base enough, to offer in exchange for such base souls.

For he scorns you while he flatters: he, a spirit ever, though twisted and distort, was never impure. With all the haughty pride of his angelic sweetness turned to gall he loathes and despises the sins by which he buys you. 'This,' he sneers, 'is man! This is the nature that God took and which even in Him I would not worship.' And with the slime of your sins he pelts God whom he hates. The stench of them is the mocking incense he swings up into the face of the Most High. Think of him! Look at your confederate. See whom you make your friend, despising the friendship that the humility of God stoops down to offer you.

" 'Surely, O Christ,' cried St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, 'thou hast made a fool of Thyself for the love of man!' Why should He care for us, what should He want of us? Yet will He not seize, but begs as a suitor! At the banquet He Himself has spread for man He stands waiting for the crumbs that fall from the table. He lies, your outcast and your beggar, at your gate. And they that are by His throne cry out, 'O Lord, how long?' When will His patience crack, how long will He suffer you?

"The mountains stand sentinel each in its appointed place; the river has no rest till it has reached the goal He set for it; the stars, Arcturus and Pleiades, and every lamp He lit in heaven, burn faithfully in His vast sanctuary of heaven: only man is a failure, following false purposes, and snatching at shadows.

"What did He make you? What have you made yourselves? What have you done with Him? He offers you the Bread of Angels, and you guzzle in the foul wash of swine. He would not even call you

servants, and you, whom He willed to make friends, have turned enemies and traitors. He made you His children, and then His soldiers, and you love the camp of His foe. Deserters! what will be your fate? and who will pity it?"

He paused again: standing still to listen, as the clock behind slowly clanged out ten.

"I have talked to you for an hour," he went on in a low, intense tone that penetrated everywhere, "and more than three thousand lives have ended while I spoke. Much more than all the number of those that dwell in your *paese*: much more than three times the number of all who are here now. When I began they were alive: now they are dead. When I began they could make up their old quarrel with God, if it were not healed already. Now, if they did not, it is too late for ever. If they were hard to the end, they shall be hard for ever, for there is no end now. Died they the friends of God, no devil can pluck them from His friendship now for ever. Their threatened bark can never be shipwrecked now, for there is no more sea. But *Ahimè!* O my people! If they died enemies of Him who has pleaded, lifelong, for their friendship—if they spurned Him obstinately from the door of their failing heart—who can help them? Not all the prayers of all the saints, nor all the Masses of all the popes and bishops and priests, though all could be offered up for *one* of them, since that first Mass in the upper chamber on the city wall to those Masses that are being said now somewhere on the other side of the world! *Ahimè!*

"O that we could call them back! O that we could bring them hither, and give them your chance

of reconciliation and repentance! Would they waste it? Will you? Theirs it is not, yours it is. Will you waste it? O Mother, call thy children home, back to the arms of thy Child. Give Him to me, He needs not the shelter of thine arms: take into it these that need: let thine hands lead them back into His love and life. . . . When God set His seal on creation, making man in His likeness, that looking on him He might see Himself reflected, man broke the mirror and gave it back with all likeness shattered. God looked and saw His image turned awry and made blasphemous, each feature degraded, spotted, and befouled. But thou, thou alone dost reflect His likeness; Mirror of Justice, pray for them. Thou, that alone dost hold the likeness He looked for in mankind, pray that each least of them may learn some trait of similitude again."

He lifted his arms towards her figure that stood above him, and seemed to bid her help. He said no more and could not. His voice had failed him in his last words, and was broken into tears. And the people wept too.

He stood awhile, but a few moments, his lips still moving without sound, and then turned abruptly into the chapel, where the others crowded after him. Not nearly all could enter, but all pressed to the doors, and those that could not get in knelt on the stones outside.

CHAPTER XII

MAROTZ went into the crowded church and knelt down as near to one of the confessionals as she could. Hals felt some one touch his shoulder, and turned to see who wanted him. It was a man who had been for some time standing close to him, occasionally so placed that the moonlight had fallen on his face, and revealed his slight, quite youthful figure, but generally in the dark shadow of the olive-trees, under one of which Hals and Marotz had themselves stood motionless. He had not been there at the opening of the sermon, but Hals had noticed him very soon after Piccolo began. It had interested the boy's grandfather to notice the effect of his preaching on this man who had not the face or bearing of a peasant, who was himself singularly handsome, and who had listened with an extraordinary attention.

When he had so stood that the moonlight fell upon him, Hals could not help being struck by his unusual beauty, his peculiar grace of bearing, and his intense interest in the preacher, which had no suggestion whatever of devotion.

"Do you want me?"

"I should like, if your Excellency will allow me, to speak to you. Your Excellency is the father of his mother?"

Hals smiled to himself. The stranger was evi-

dently too courteous to accuse him flatly of so big a grandson.

"Yes," he said, "I am his grandfather."

"But you never heard him before to-night?"

"No."

"I have heard him now five times. The first time was almost an accident: now he drags me, and I can't help following him."

"You have heard him five times—does he repeat himself? Is it the same sermon, or nearly, everywhere?"

Hals had been rather curious to know this, and was glad to find some one at hand to tell him.

"Oh, no. He never says anything twice over. One never knows what is coming. Perhaps he does not."

"Does he know you follow him?"

"No, certainly. That would annoy him. But as he goes here and there among the mountains I keep him in sight. If he needed one I should be his body-guard. But he does not need one."

"I should think not. Even the brigands would not dare to touch him."

"They, at all events, would not dare," said the stranger decidedly. So decidedly that Hals looked more closely at him. As if to help him, the man stood back a pace and let the broad moonlight fall for a moment on his face and tall, slight figure.

"You do not recognise me?" he inquired in a smiling voice, stepping back into the black shadow.

"I am afraid I must confess that your respected name has escaped my memory. You appear to know mine."

"Yes. You are Prince Nostitz, whom our people

insist on calling Principe di San Vito. I am not so distinguished, though perhaps as much spoken of, and my Christian name is the same as your Excellency's."

Hals laughed lightly.

"Arrigo Cilia? Is that your name?"

It was so dark that he could only see his companion nod, though he *felt* that he was smiling.

"*Ecco!* I am right. The nephew of our late much respected *parocco*. But I have not heard your name for a long time.

"I am chiefly spoken of as Pipistrello,"¹ said Arrigo modestly. "One's family name is merged."

"Is there any particular title," inquired Hals, with cool politeness, "by which a captain of brigands should be addressed? You will excuse my not knowing, I live so much out of the world."

Pipistrello laughed.

"Titles are for inferiors," he replied lightly.

"Is it your profession," asked Hals, "that makes you look so young? Your—pardon me, you have not told me the term—Latitude must be nearly fifty."

Pipistrello laughed again. He knew that bishops, among other titles, are accorded that of "Amplitude."

"Your Excellency guesses well. I am fifty. But I am detaining you——"

"I was hoping you did not intend to do so. It would be interesting to visit you, but I was about to beg you would not insist upon it on the present occasion, as I am in charge of a lady. If you removed

¹ The bat.

me to the mountains the Principessa di Torre Marco would be inconvenienced."

This time the brigand did not laugh.

"The Principessa shall never be inconvenienced by me," he said earnestly. "I would do much to serve her, and the Fra Principe, as the *contadini* call her son."

Hals bowed.

"How does her son's preaching strike you?" he inquired, with a sort of indifferent interest; "as a judge, it would be interesting to know your opinion."

"Ignore, do not mock. He has nearly converted me five times. His five sermons have been to me like the five wounds of Gesu Cristo, in hands and feet and side."

Hals grew grave instantly.

"He is eloquent," said Pipistrello.

"Eloquence," suggested Hals, "is in the ears of the hearers."

"Not in mine. If anywhere it would be in my eyes. As he stood there with the moonlight on his face, and the mountains far above listening, the statue behind, and all the night around, he was the most beautiful thing I ever saw."

"*Ecco!*" observed the prince.

Some one else touched him from behind, and he turned sharply. It was a priest, closely muffled about the throat in the folds of a black *fariuola*. The shadow of his big hat, added to that of the trees, rendered his face quite indistinguishable.

"Do you know to whom you have been talking?"

Hals glanced quickly over his shoulder, but Pipistrello had disappeared. Close to the little

plateau, on which the sanctuary stood, the hill-side fell abruptly, almost in a precipice, covered with a brake of prickly pears and carobia.

"Quite well. But I do not know who is speaking to me now."

"I am the Bishop. I came to hear your grandson preach."

"So did Pipistrello. I hope your Most Illustrious Excellency is not going to interfere with his devotions and send the carabinieri after him."

The Bishop laughed gently.

"*Certo*, no. Let him hear as many sermons as he will. He needs many."

"He was brought up on them," observed Hals agreeably; "his uncle was our priest."

"I know. He killed him."

"*Per carità!*" said Hals, taking leave to make use of Zia's favourite phrase, since she was gone where there is no need of it.

"His theft certainly caused his uncle's death," said the Bishop. "But let that be. I knew you were here, and wished to speak to you. You heard the boy preach. What do you think of it?"

"Pipistrello, who is a better judge than I, says he is eloquent."

"Eloquent. Very likely. Of that, Signore Principe, I make no pretence to be a judge. Is he a saint?"

"Of that I certainly am no judge. Ask his mother, she is one."

The Bishop touched him lightly on the arm.

"My son, let us talk otherwise. Not as the crackling of thorns under a pot. You mean that the boy's

mother is a saint and *therefore* is the best judge of her son's sanctity. To a saint every one seems saintly except herself."

The Bishop moved out of the shadow, and sat down in the white moonlight on a low wall, and motioned to Hals to sit beside him. He was a youngish man with a fine, intelligent face, and a thin, active figure.

"Perhaps," he added simply, "I can judge better than she can."

"And what is your judgment?"

The Bishop sighed.

"I wish I knew. My judgment is not formed. He may be a saint: but not yet I think. Christ said to Peter, 'Satan hath greatly desired thee, that he may bruise thee as wheat.' But he became a saint—after a most horrible fall."

Hals was now grave enough.

"'Do men gather grapes of thorns?'" he asked quietly.

"The fruit seems good. I welcome all good, whoever does it. But the sermon disappointed me."

Hals asked nothing, but looked his question, turning to his companion.

"It was hard—full of sting and reproach. As if he was *biting* at the hearts of these poor ignorant sheep of mine. And it was not humble: all the reproach was in the second person. He seemed to have no share in their faults."

"He is as clean as a flower," said Hals proudly.

"He? Yes. Brought up as he has been, with such a mother, in an exquisite seclusion, he would be a monster if at fifteen he were not clean. But he showed no pity for their temptations, having known none."

"But, Excellency, granting he is not a saint. It was you that suggested the idea of his being a saint at all. Suppose he is no saint. Can he do no good by his preaching? Are all your priests saints?"

"No. And, as you say, good may be done. Is now being done, I trust, in there."

He pointed to the chapel, and continued:

"Yes. I admit what you mean. 'He who is not with Me is against Me.' So, too, would the Apostles reprove some who cast out devils, and Gesu Cristo would not suffer their reproofs. You think I am like them."

"Excellency! I am not so impertinent. But he is a child. Surely it is better a lad did this than what some lads do."

Hals was thinking of the other youths of the San Vito.

For some time the Bishop held his peace, pondering.

"There is one primary test," he said at length. "That of obedience. If I forbade him to preach any more would he obey?"

"Ask him. Shall I fetch him?"

"If you can find him."

Hals went into the chapel and did find him, kneeling in the thick of the crowd. He touched him on the shoulder and whispered in his ear. The boy at once rose and came with him.

Together they crossed the moonlit piazza and came to where the Bishop still sat upon the wall.

"Here is Piccolo," said Hals simply. "Piccolo, this is the Bishop."

"I came to-night to hear you preach," said the prelate.

"I only spoke to the *contadini*," said the lad; "I did not know there were any priests. I had nothing to say to them."

"Who gave you leave to preach?"

"No one. I had to."

The Bishop had half expected he would say "God," and was glad of the more unaffected answer.

"Do you know that no priest, even, may preach in a diocese without the bishop's leave?"

"I dare say. But they preach in churches, which belong to your Most Reverend Excellency. Outside any one may talk. Only, I have talked of what was in my mind; some have only politics to talk of. And some tell *romanze*. No one interferes with them."

Hals inwardly chuckled: he liked the Bishop, on the whole, but he had liked Piccolo longer. And he remembered the scenes in Palermo and Catania where he had seen men telling novels—*romanze*—to crowds of eager listeners. As Piccolo said, no one interfered with them.

"If I forbade you to preach in my diocese what would you do?"

"I do not preach. But if you forbade me to speak to the people I would stop speaking."

"You would not ask why I forbade you?"

"I should only ask myself. And I could not answer."

"But you would go on speaking to the people, as you call it, elsewhere—in other dioceses?"

"Oh, yes. Until some other bishop forbade me. I do not know much about dioceses. I thought this was the same as Torre Marco and San Vito."

"But, if it is wrong for you to do this in one diocese, why not in another?"

"I did not say it was wrong. If one bishop allows me I suppose he thinks it does not matter. In one diocese they may use milk on Fridays in Lent, and not in another. That is for the bishops to decide."

Hals was still chuckling inside. Perhaps the Bishop was amused also.

"Very well. I decide in mine. Go on preaching. But he who preaches must begin with himself."

CHAPTER XIII

MAROTZ meanwhile was in the chapel, waiting for her turn amid the crowd who surrounded the confessionals. Once a year there was a great pilgrimage to this sanctuary, and at that time many priests came there to hear the confessions of the pilgrims. And to-night all the priests of the *paese* were there; the chapel was large, but full to overflowing, and when any had finished, and went out, their places were immediately taken by others from outside. Over the high altar hung a very ancient picture of the Madonna, of Greek type, that had been venerated in this spot for many centuries. Tradition held that it had been found, one summer night, hanging among the branches of an olive-tree and surrounded by an unearthly light. The chapel had been built on the place, and had ever since been a point of pilgrimage.

The sanctuary was interesting, and was adorned with dim frescoes of the earliest period of revived Italian art. But its chief glory was the mosaic decoration of the apse, and certain antique columns supporting the arches of the nave, though these had certainly never been originally intended for a Christian church.

At last to Marotz also came her turn, and she entered one of the confessionals and knelt down.

"*Padre mio*," she said, when she had accused herself of the faults of the last few days, "there is something more important. I have done some one a great wrong: at the time I thought I was doing right, but now it is plain to me that no one has any right to do what I did."

She paused, but the priest made no comment, leaving her to tell her own story. Seeing she hesitated, he said gently, "*Coraggio!* Who is not mistaken sometimes? Wisdom is not born with us, but comes by learning."

"I did not intend evil, but good. Nevertheless I did evil. It was in my power to give to some one a thing to which he was entitled: or to prevent his having it. And I prevented it. It seemed to me almost certain he would misuse it—against God. I had seen it horribly misused, and it appeared to me terrible if it should be so abused again, to his ruin and the offence of God. It was in my hands to let him have it, or to be without it. And I durst not risk giving it to him. So I kept it from him. Now it is certain he would use it greatly, for God's glory and his own profit."

She paused again, and the priest asked her,

"Can you give it to him now?"

"No. Not his own. But I can give him mine." She could scarcely speak, and the priest could see that it was so.

"My child, would that be a great sacrifice?"

"I could make no greater, but in justice one must count no cost of restitution. I have promised to God that he shall have it."

"Suppose he whom you have thus unintentionally

defrauded will not accept your giving up to him what is your own?"

"He will not know now. I can do it secretly. Just as he did not know it was kept back from him, so he will not know yet that I have made restitution."

She did not tell him what it was she had withheld and he did not ask. The priest felt sure it was some matter of property.

"God will bless your sacrifice," he said. "It is a great grace that He has given you to-night. You owe a deep debt to the preacher whose words have moved you to this hard resolution, and to Our Lady who has taken you in her arms, as he begged her, and brought you here to her Son. It is far easier to give than to give back. Justice is much more difficult than generosity. To give freely what is all our own often pleases our self-love, but there is no pleasure of vanity in yielding up what we ought never to have withheld. Let us never forget again that justice comes before everything: '*ruat cælum fiat justitia*'; God has given us no authority to dispense with it for what may seem to us a greater good." His tone was gentle and very kind; Marotz listened humbly. How little he guessed what he was authorising her to do. When he had assigned her penance and was about to give absolution she stopped him.

"*Padre mio*, will you allow me to go and say my penance first, and come back for absolution later?"

"It is not necessary, but you may do as you will."

She rose and went out of the confessional, taking her place among the thinning crowd.

It was a strange farewell she had to make. Hadrian's farewell to his soul was but bidding good

CHAPTER XIV

MAROTZ and Hals went back to San Vito, and, after she had heard their account, Onofria repeated it all to Prioressa.

"So you see," she said with a certain sense of family triumph, "he converts many people and makes them go to the sacraments. That cannot be Beelzebub."

"Chi lo sa? He makes people do a little good so as to lead them to do worse afterwards."

"But," cried Onofria, with unusual spirit, "what else do the missionaries do, whom the bishop sends? Is that also Beelzebub?"

"Speriamo di no! But the bishop *does* send them. That is different. That is customary. It is holy obedience."

"And the bishop told Piccolo he might go on preaching!"

"He was unwilling to offend the *principatura*, perhaps. Who knows? Bishops have to think of many things."

In her sparring matches with Prioressa the poor Duchessa had as much chance of getting the best of it as a white mouse would have of overcoming a horned owl in single combat.

Lucia asked her husband many questions.

"Is he really a saint?" she inquired.

"How can I tell? He is not in the least like his

mother or you. The bishop did not think him a saint. It seemed to me that the bishop was afraid of him."

"Afraid!"

"Yes. Afraid of his doing harm—first of all to himself."

"Tell me again about his preaching. He must be in earnest."

"In earnest! He was fearfully excited. He did not shout, or jump about. He could never be, or do, anything noisy or vulgar; but he was so excited that sometimes he could scarcely control his voice. He grew very pale, and he lashed the people with his tongue, as if his words were scorpions."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, it was not *what* he said, but *how* he said it. It was not a long discourse, but he was tired when it was finished. He could hardly stand."

Meanwhile Piccolo was passing through the mountains, more and more talked about, the fame of his doings getting into the Sicilian and Neapolitan papers, though of that he himself knew nothing. This sort of publicity would not have pleased him, neither did it please the Casa San Vito, and as little did it conduce to the satisfaction of the bishops. There was another person, who considered Piccolo's doings concerned himself, whom it annoyed exceedingly.

One night the boy was preaching outside another small hill-town, and he noticed two men, one of whom he had seen several times already listening to his sermons on the furthest verge of the crowd; the other he had never seen before. These men were not now together or near each other; nor did he connect one

with the other. But they were both so different from the *contadini* who formed his usual audience that he was attracted almost equally by both.

One was exceedingly handsome, and had a peculiar grace of bearing, and, though not a gentleman, had a manner of appearance wholly unlike that of the country-folk. He never took his eyes off the speaker, and his attention and absorption in him was singularly flattering. It was entirely personal, and much more like intense emotional admiration than religious fervour. This man was, as the reader knows, Pipistrello, the brigand captain.

The other was not so tall, nor so handsome, but still was good-looking, and, what was much rarer among Piccolo's hearers, one of his own class.

He listened carefully, but certainly without enthusiasm; nor did he keep his eyes constantly on the preacher. He was much nearer, and Piccolo was sure that his attention, such as it was, was merely politeness.

The lad felt this, and the consciousness of it affected himself. He spoke as fluently as he had ever done, but not with the same simplicity. He listened, as it were, to his own words, and wondered how they would sound in the cultivated, unimpressed ears of the coolly attentive stranger. The spontaneity that had been his sole force faltered, and he became less direct and more argumentative. It was, to-night, a sort of eager special-pleading, more dexterous than usual, but more heartless.

He tried to say again things he had said on earlier occasions, and had seen were effectual, but the phrases now sounded merely glib, and he per-

ceived that they were one-sided; half-disavowed by himself it was not strange that they streamed forth unconvincingly.

Pipistrello felt almost at once that there was a change, and instantly attributed it to the right cause. It was as though the stranger had the *mal occhio*, and each time his eyes met Piccolo's the effect on the speaker was more apparent.

The stranger's manner was perfectly well-bred, he betrayed no impatience, and had not the air of one who is bored and listens under protest, but it expressed plain disappointment. And Piccolo's discourse became more and more disappointing.

At the end of it he appealed far more vehemently than he had ever before done to the people to have recourse to repentance and confession; but, for the first time, somewhat ineffectually. Not a quarter of his audience followed the priests into the church to go to confession. Nor was there much enthusiasm for the preacher himself. They discussed him, admired him, gossiped about him, but were not moved by him.

"Come è bello!"

"How tall he is!"

"A giant! They say he is only fifteen, and he is as big as Goliath."

"He preaches better than any priest in Sicily. My cousin, who is a priest, tells it is so, and he has heard two cardinals—at Palermo and Acireale."

"His mother fainted when she heard him. And has left her husband to go and become a nun."

"He is hugely rich; but he begs his way through the mountains and sleeps in the woods. He has

vowed never to eat meat, or marry, or have any money in his pocket. The Pope wants to make him a cardinal at once. But he runs away. He will have no dignity. And for humility he refuses to be a priest."

"That is all lies. His mother has not become a nun; she is dead. Her husband killed her. He was a Tedesco and grew jealous of an old monk that she thought everything of. He went to China as ambassador to get out of the way. That is the true reason why this boy cannot become a priest; no one can be a priest whose father was a murderer or a butcher."

"Nor is it true he has no money; he often gives some to the people who look as if they were very poor, and had come from far to hear him. . . ."

And so on; they had come to be astonished, and they helped one another to be so as far as possible. The quality of Piccolo's audience had changed as well as the quality of what they heard. He was a sensation, to be seen, stared at, chattered about.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN his discourse was finished and the crowd had broken up into chattering groups, Piccolo saw no more of the man whom he had often before noticed, nor was he thinking of him. Of the other stranger, whose presence had disconcerted him so strongly, he did think. The boy did not, this time, go into the church, but turned away from the little town and struck into a winding path that led up the hill-side through a low scrub, broken here and there by the spreading darkness of a carobia, and here and there by a clump of contorted olive-trees.

The night was fresh and the moon had but lately risen; it was not very late. Down below, where he had preached, lamps had been hung about on the lower branches of the trees.

Presently he heard other footsteps following, and stood still to see whose they were. He felt sure that they were those of his unimpressed auditor.

Where he waited was an open flat space with a slab of rock, on which he sat down. He did not know why he expected the strange gentleman, but he knew that he did; and he knew also that he felt excited, as if something impossible to divine, or provide for, were about to happen.

He watched the path by which he had mounted, and in a few moments the figure he had foreseen appeared.

"I want to speak to you," said the gentleman, as soon as he was near enough. "I hope you do not mind my following you?"

"No, I thought it was you when I heard your footsteps behind me."

He moved a little and the stranger sat down beside him.

"You perhaps saw me while you were speaking to the people?"

Piccolo nodded.

"Yes. I could not say anything to them to-night. You seemed to prevent me!"

The gentleman smiled.

"I should like to prevent you. Why should you try and say anything to them?"

"At first I did not try. I had to. But to-night it was different; my mouth seemed full of wool. All I said was flat and stale and ineffectual. Very few of the people went to confession afterwards."

"That is their fault, if anybody's; why should *you* make it your affair? You are not a priest."

"I thought God told me to go and speak to them," the boy answered simply; but added sadly, "and at first they listened and did go to confession."

"Well, and now they don't; evidently you have done all there was for you to do—if there ever was anything. Shall you go on?"

Piccolo did not answer at once: he had been wondering.

"Why did you say," he inquired presently, "that you would like to prevent my trying to speak thus to the people? Is it *your* affair? since you tell me to do so is not mine."

He did not speak pertly or rudely, but with a quiet, plain dignity.

"My own family do not mind," he added.

"Do they not?" the stranger remarked coolly. "They ought to, if they were capable of taking proper care of you. And one of them at all events does object very strongly."

His tone was peculiar, and Piccolo turned sharply to look at him.

"I do not quite perceive," he said, "your right to speak to me as you are doing." Even as he spoke he felt an odd sinking of the heart.

His companion did not show any resentment at his remark. He was thinking how strange it was that a mother and son should be both so beautiful and so entirely unlike. The unlikeness pleased him. He remembered her beauty well but he had never loved it.

"You do not recognise my right to be concerned in your peculiar doings. Probably you have not yet guessed who I am."

Piccolo's face flushed in the moonlight; and he did guess.

"Are you my father?"

Rodrigo di Toledo bowed, with a cold smile and said, "I have that honour."

Piccolo could not look at him. The chill about his heart deepened. He felt an extraordinary opposition of impulses in himself, to love and to hate.

"You knew, then, that you had a father?"

"I asked my mother years ago if she was a widow, and she said no. She told me no more and I never asked."

"It did not seem odd that you should never hear of me or see me?"

Piccolo looked straight before him across the valley into the darkness. The moon, over the mountain opposite, shone upon their faces.

"I thought you had done my mother some injury." His voice was aloof and hard.

Rodrigo laughed.

"It did not occur to you that *she* might have injured me?"

The lad started visibly, and he felt himself shaking from head to foot. Then he answered bravely:

"I have known her all my life."

"No doubt. But you knew nothing of me. You could never compare us. You could never judge, because you knew only one side of the question."

"I knew nothing. I did not know there was any question. But I knew her. And I can compare you with her now."

Rodrigo smiled grimly to himself, but he said good-humouredly:

"I have the honour to gather that the comparison is not fortunate for me."

"I do not want to compare you and her. She stands by herself. No one can be compared with her."

"Listen. I will tell you first of all why I do not wish you to continue your eccentric preaching tour. Later on it may be possible to convince you that even your father has some claim upon you for a certain decent regard, though he is not so ambitious as to suppose himself entitled to any of your affection."

He paused, and, seeing that Piccolo was certainly attentive, continued:

"I am not specially addicted to ecclesiastical studies, but perhaps may claim to be of average intelligence. Well, it seems to me that in the Church saints are abnormal, exceptional, and so to them exceptional procedure has been allowed. To the ordinary person the rule of ordinary procedure is obligatory. No doubt you may be an exceptional person, and very likely a saint. But I confess I hope not. At all events you have no right to take it for granted, which you are doing, permitting yourself a sort of saintly license that is spectacular, and to me, a mere common-sense person, somewhat repulsive. There is no need to say that your manner of behaving is vulgar; but it goes disagreeably near to vulgarity. Anyway it is noisy, and sensational; and to see your erratic doings flaming day by day in the *giornali* is insufferable to one of your parents, whatever it may be to the other."

He paused again, and, drawing a cigarette from his case, proceeded to light it deliberately.

"Perhaps," said Piccolo, as calmly as he could, "I gave you a wrong impression. I did not ask my mother's leave for doing what I have done, or tell her I was going to do it. But when I began neither she, nor any of them, interfered: not even after she and Pahals, my grandfather, had heard me."

"I am glad," observed Rodrigo, "that none of them gave you permission to begin this outrageous exhibition of yourself: but sorry you should have done such a thing without consulting any who had the right to know of such a plan; and sorry that, when you had given yourself leave, none of them should have told you it was unfitting."

"I saw my mother for a few minutes after she had heard me, and she did not hint that it was unfitting."

"I am not," said his father coldly, "attempting to weigh my judgment against hers. But I will take leave to make you understand what my judgment is. What qualifications have you for preaching to men, you are a boy and do not know what men's temptations are? Is it not arrogance to scold poor peasants for being no better, or worse, than others of their sort? What do you know of their sins, or who gave you leave to judge them?"

He paused again, but not this time to suffer himself to be interrupted. Now he changed his voice and his manner, and spoke with a friendly indulgence, as to a comrade.

"Piccolo! In five years' time you would not be hypocrite enough to rail against sins which you now know nothing of; for you yourself will have ceased to be ignorant of them. You have been reared as in a convent, but you cannot live always in one. You will be, presently, as other men, as I am, as all men who have lived in the world are—even these poor peasants, whom you rate, living in their little world. Already I see you know very well what I am talking of. You have had no temptations, so you have yielded to none. Wait. The Church herself does not expect of men what you demand. The angels are in heaven. And the angels are spirits: we poor men are equipped with bodies, and was their nature unknown and unforeseen? What you have rushed out to declaim against are natural instincts, as natural as to eat, and sleep, and laugh, and enjoy all natural beauty. True, you have not yet reached this chapter

in your life: why then rant as if you knew the whole book? Leave it to the saints to do the impossible. After all, have all the saints changed men's nature, or succeeded in emasculating mankind? Sisyphus spent his life rolling a great ball up a steep hill, but immutable law made his labour vain. The saints would sneer at him as a heathen fable. But they cannot see they have been doing the same thing. In spite of them all men remain men, and certainly you will not make them anything else."

"At least they need not be beasts."

"Beasts! who gave you leave to sneer at beasts? Did some devil make the beasts? And when you liken your fellow-men to them, what does it all amount to? That they are as men have been from the beginning, and, in spite of you, will be to the end. Do not be too insolent against nature, lest she take revenge of you. Your immaculate youth is often the slowest to lay aside his follies at last; he is still clinging to the 'faults of youth' when youth has long fled, Many a hoary scapegrace might have settled down into middle-aged respectability if he had not been so impossibly good as a lad or a young man. Preach away now, Piccolo, and when you are my age you will be a scamp."

CHAPTER XVI

PICCOLO was alone again and it was now late. His father had gone down to the *paese* to sleep in the miserable albergo. He had said more, and had said it with an ever-increasing urbanity; his tone, so mordant at first, had grow flattering, and the lad was as defenceless against the subtle flattery as against the stinging gibes that had made it so welcome a change. With his big limbs he was still a boy, and what chance had he against the cold skill of such a man as Rodrigo? Except Don Fabio di Maiori and his mother's father and grandfather, Piccolo had scarcely met any men of his own class. Rodrigo was cleverer than Don Fabio, and, his son thought, quite as handsome. True, he had only seen him in the flattering moonlight, which, with the Duke's slim figure, made him seem a young man. In truth he was young enough, being still under forty.

Rodrigo had treated him at last with the frank confidence of a comrade, admitting his own laxities with very unpaternal explicitness.

"You see," he explained, "I was exiled by your mother. And as we were not divorced it would have been impossible, even if I had wished it, to marry again. Saints do not think of those things."

He had flattered the boy's talents, and his beauty.

No one had ever flattered either before; and he did it briefly and skilfully.

"Your mother's son could not help being a genius," he said, "and could not help being beautiful. But neither your beauty nor your genius resembles hers. You have had the good sense not to take after me, anyway! I knew you would be clever, and was eager to see a son who I felt certain would be worth seeing; but I confess I was not prepared for any one so beautiful. How women will spoil you!"

He suggested that Piccolo should come with him to the albergo, but did not press it. There was only one wretched guest-room.

"But, Piccolo, to-morrow we must meet again. At Catania I have a small yacht, and you must come with me to Naples. Your mother has had you fifteen years, and, as she can't keep you at home, she cannot mind my borrowing you for a month or two."

Piccolo sat alone upon his slab of rock for a few moments, then rose and followed the path which mounted higher up the mountain. He was wholly occupied with his thoughts, which were all of his father, and of the things his father had said and hinted. He had been attracted and subjugated, people would say now "hypnotised," perhaps. He had never made any effort to please before, for his little circle had been pleased without any effort on his part; but now he felt an intense desire to please. He too, as his mother had done years ago, made Rodrigo into a priest of the wide temple of life, but, unlike her, divined mysteries, things veiled, in his father's words, and experienced a peculiar excited curiosity

in regard to them. As Rodrigo said, he already was able to guess their nature.

At no more dangerous moment could the lad have fallen suddenly into the seduction of such an influence, disappointed as he was, and disillusioned, his self-love bruised, and an unconscious, but strong, hunger for change filling an energy that had been abruptly turned aside.

Presently the path he was following unheedingly turned along the mountain-side and ceased to climb, bringing him in a few minutes to an open, flat space in front of a small house, behind which the hill rose steeply, covered with thicket. It was so late that he was somewhat surprised to see light in its windows, one of which was open, and uncurtained. As he walked on the rough, stony path he made some noise, and a woman came to the door and opened it. There was no moon now and she could not see him plainly, nor he her, though he, used to the darkness, could distinguish her more plainly than she him.

"Arrigo," she said, coming towards him, "I thought you said you could not come to-night, that you had to meet the others beyond Fiumara?"

They were now close together, and they both stood in the shaft of light that streamed out of the open door, and, almost before she had done speaking, she saw it was a stranger.

She stopped abruptly, but looked keenly at him, and saw nothing alarming.

"I am afraid you expected some one and are disappointed," he said, uncovering and holding his cap in his hand. She could see his beautiful ruddy curls and was flattered by his respectful manner.

"Come in, Signore," she said, turning, and Piccolo followed her indoors.

It was not quite such a place as he would have expected; not altogether like a peasant's cottage. There were comforts and small luxuries, even attempts at refinement, and some paintings, notably an excellent portrait of his hostess. She was perhaps half-a-dozen years older than himself, evidently a *contadina*, and a handsome girl.

"'Arrigo,' " he thought, "must be an artist." He did not, somehow, fancy she was "Arrigo's" wife. Nevertheless she spoke of him presently as her husband. He was not always at home, she said, and to-night had to go to a distant place to meet some people on his business.

"Generally even thus I am not alone. But our old servant has also been called away to nurse her daughter, who is sick."

"I had been intending," said Piccolo, "to ask if I could sleep here, for I saw the light and knew some one must be up. Also I am hungry, for I have eaten nothing since *mezzo-giorno*."

"Sit down, Signore," she said, smiling, "and I will soon give you something to eat."

She closed the door and fastened it, drawing a thick dark curtain across the window; then set about putting food and wine upon the table. As she moved about he did not watch her, but looked at her portrait, on which the light from the lamp shone fully. It was not exactly the work of a trained portrait-painter, but was full of character and genius. It was exactly like, and expressed more of her than she herself had expressed yet to Piccolo in the brief

glimpses he had had of her. The face was artistically beautiful, but lacked ethical significance. Colour and form had done their best, but the charm was all external; there was no soul, or it was dumb, and had nothing to express. There was nothing hard or brazen, or even bold; on the contrary there was an almost delicate softness. But it was the softness of a young animal. Particularly was this true of the large, very liquid eyes, whose colour the painter had rendered dexterously.

"Now, Signore, come and eat!"

She herself placed a chair and Piccolo went to it. He could no longer see the picture and had to look at her instead. She attended to his wants, and chatted to him, and he noticed that her voice was rich and her intonation musical, with none of a peasant's harsh sharpness; and he observed that she had beautiful hands.

"Perhaps your husband," he remarked presently, "would not be pleased if he returned and found a stranger at supper in his house."

"Oh, he will not return. And this is *my* house. I am mistress here."

"I am, at all events, most grateful for your hospitality."

"*Niente, niente*. That is nothing; there is no other house. You must stay here."

Their eyes met and Piccolo flushed swiftly. He did not say whether he would stay or not, to her or to himself. He pretended to suppose that when he had finished eating he should go.

Presently she came round and filled his glass again, then stood half beside him, half behind. His

eyes were bent upon his plate. She stooped and kissed his hair, laying one hand upon his shoulder. He drew it down and held it. Bending his head slowly backward she bent down again and kissed his forehead, then his lips.

CHAPTER XVII

RODRIGO DI TOLEDO found no difficulty in enforcing his wish that Piccolo should go away with him. He had not felt at all sure that he would even give up the preaching. He saw that he had produced a strong effect, but had been doubtful if it would persist. He was not a conceited man, and was not inclined to overestimate any influence he might have gained, seeing that it must be balanced by the accumulated counter-influences of the lad's whole life. Nevertheless he knew that novelty is often more powerful than habit, especially with the young and with the eager, who are apt to credit novelty with all it promises and all it boasts.

What Rodrigo did not perceive was that his son had woven a veil of mystery, almost hero-worship, round himself.

Piccolo was eager to go. He loathed to be where he had preached, and the last person he could bear to see was his mother. Instinctively he knew that he had written something on his face, which he thought she would have read there.

His father did read it, for the lad's interior excitement had altered him even externally. At first Rodrigo was merely puzzled, then he understood what had happened. Inwardly, bad as he was himself, he despised him. "He has lost no time,"

he said to himself. "That is the way with your saints—out of heaven there is only one leap into the pig-sty."

But he was extremely careful to express nothing of the sort. His manner was peculiarly flattering and paternal.

"My dear boy," he said, laying a hand affectionately on his shoulder, "it is nothing. I think something has happened to you which must happen some day to every manly fellow."

Piccolo flushed, but felt an odd satisfaction.

His father, scorning him coldly all the time, was satisfied too. He had been unspeakably irritated at the idea of having a saint for a son as well as for a wife. He need not have been afraid!

They went away together and at Catania took up their quarters on the yacht, but did not leave for a day or two, spending much time on shore, especially at night, where Piccolo made his first acquaintance with the theatre, and kindred pleasures. All he wanted was to continue excited, to do new things continually; he was resolved not to think or to repent.

Thence they sailed to Palermo, where there was more to see and more to do, and after some days there the yacht took them to Naples, where they left her. Before leaving Sicily, and not till then, Piccolo wrote briefly to his mother, telling her where he was and with whom, and that his father insisted on his remaining some time with him, which he himself desired to do. "I am glad to be out of Sicily," he said, "at all events far from the places where I made a fool of myself. My father knows I did it

without consulting you, or seeing whether you approved. If only I and everybody could forget that I had ever done it."

But that was what no one would forget. The papers that had vulgarised his preaching now stated that it had abruptly finished, and that the youthful scion of the *principatura* had, if rumour might be trusted, adopted a manner of life much more usual in those of his age and class.

Rumours crept to San Vito, in letters to Onofria from correspondents who had forgotten her for years, and some of them were so kind as to send newspapers, lest certain paragraphs they marked should not happen to meet the eye of any one at San Vito. One of these was headed "St. Vitus's Dance" (*Il Ballo di San Vito*).

The poor Duchessa was too old now to keep anything to herself, and showed them all to Marotz, who had lingered on with Hals and Lucia, as if she had not the heart to go back to empty Torre Marco. If her grandmother understood the papers, which perhaps she might not have done but for the horrified interpretation of her correspondents at Palermo and Catania, it was not likely that their sting would be lost on Piccolo's mother.

"His father," gasped the old woman, "has introduced him to some of the wildest young men in Palermo, and no doubt he did the same at Catania. Of course they are all older than Piccolo, but they say he has learned all that they could teach him. I suppose it will be the same at Naples."

It was the same at Naples. Piccolo was already there by the time the news of his dissipations at

Catania and Palermo reached San Vito. And presently from Naples also crept tidings of the life the lad was leading there. Very likely the rumours exaggerated—when does rumour minimise anything scandalous? But it was true that he who had preached to others was himself a castaway.

To Onofria it seemed simply fate: the inevitable fate, as it seemed, of every youth of her husband's family. She collapsed mentally, and could only whimper to herself. To Prioressa she dared not go, she could not face her grim triumph. It was indeed Beelzebub.

Lucia and Hals were determined to believe as little as possible, but they could not disbelieve everything.

A horrible idea came to Marotz that this was Rodrigo's revenge: that he had deliberately led her son into evil to punish her. He must have known that no punishment could have been so ghastly, no revenge more overwhelming. She put the loathsome thought away, but it always lay in wait for her, to sting her again and again at every unguarded moment when she grew weary of standing sentinel over her mind.

Precisely that had happened which, before he was born, had made her will that he should have no soul to ruin for himself, and to turn as a foul weapon against God. Now she had given him hers, and she felt an accomplice in his sins. It was her soul he was defiling, with her soul that he was fighting against God.

Cain seemed to her innocent in comparison with Rodrigo, if her ever-recurrent suspicion was true. To slay a brother's body was natural compared to the deliberate slaying of a son's soul.

With all her might she struggled against allowing the monstrous notion to become an actual belief. She tried to think of some noble trait in the man who was her son's father that would contradict any theory so detestable: of any generosity, any pity; but memory would send nothing to her assistance. She could only turn away from the idea, leaving it unvanquished.

At last she did go back to Torre Marco, to her people, and tried to pick up again the snapped threads of her life there. She was as good to them who needed her as ever, and they found her not less kind, not less useful. But her burden was in truth greater than she could bear. To Rodrigo she wrote once, to Piccolo constantly; but the wretched lad was afraid of reading her letters, and if he wrote to her at wide intervals it was never to answer anything she had written. Rodrigo did read her letter, carefully and coldly, but he did not answer it.

Meanwhile he had given, not all at once, or with any apparent intention, his own account to Piccolo of the causes that had led to the separation between Marotz and himself. Of course, he said nothing of Cica, the goat-herd's daughter, nor did he descend to such particularity as to dates as to make the lad understand that anything to offend his wife had taken place after their marriage. But he was very comprehensible in his admission that he had been far from saintly as a bachelor, and he made the boy aware that his laxities had come to the knowledge of Marotz, who had been implacable and unforgiving. He had no air of complaining, he left it to Piccolo to suppose that the saintly and irreproachable wife had

been hard and proudly unforgiving. It was not difficult to do all this with very little falsehood of actual statement. He omitted judiciously, and he implied judiciously: for his purpose that was enough. He was not much concerned by the chance of his son's ultimately arriving at the truth. Nor, after all, was such a chance by any means equivalent to a certainty. Piccolo would assuredly never question his mother, and was not very likely to question any one else.

The peculiar attraction he had for the lad, which was partly natural and partly unnatural—due to sonship, and very unpaternal though flattering treatment—continued and perhaps grew. Rodrigo might not have cared for it but for the cold triumph of his knowledge that everything thus given to himself was stolen from Marotz. Thus regarded it had value, for he had never forgiven her. He knew very well that she had never blamed him to their son, for he knew her. But he knew also that her son now blamed her, and that was a grateful enough revenge for her sanctity and superiority. She had desired that Piccolo should know nothing of him; it was pleasant to confuse his knowledge of herself.

CHAPTER XVIII

PICCOLO had been with his father nearly a year when there came a letter to him which fell first into Rodrigo's hands. It was addressed in a handwriting so evidently feminine and illiterate that the Duke examined it with suspicious interest. Had it borne the post-mark of San Vito or Torre Marco only, he would have concluded it to be from Piccolo's nurse or perhaps from Ancilla, whom Rodrigo remembered very well. But the first post-mark was that of the little town close to which Piccolo had preached his last sermon, and the letter had been sent on from San Vito. His father opened it and read it. It was from some one who signed herself "Ninfa."

"*Carissimo*," it began.

"I would like to say '*Carissimo* Piccolo,' for you told me that is what you are called, though you are so big. But perhaps you would be offended, for you may have forgotten the night you spent here. Have you forgotten it? I never shall forget it. I was never happy like that before. For, though I have lived here with Arrigo nearly four years, and he is almost as handsome as you are, he is nearly fifty years old, and that is more than double the age I have. I loved you the moment you spoke to me, with the light from the door shining on your face. No, I shall never forget that night, and how hard it was to let you go

in the morning. You only turned back to smile and wave your hand once. I watched long after you were out of sight. I hoped you would come back some time, but you never came. That is why I suppose you have forgotten me.

"I have had great difficulty in finding out your name. But every one near here had seen you and knew who you were. Only I was frightened of asking many questions about you. San Vito is not so very far from here. Can you come and see me? All next week Arrigo will be away, far from here; and I want to see you. Nearly three months ago I had a *bambino*, and it is yours. Arrigo has quite altered to me lately. The *bambino* is not at all like him, nor did I tell him till just before it was born that it was coming. I knew it was not his. And I now believe he knows it too; or suspects it. And I am getting frightened of him. Of course we are not married, but that makes no difference to him. If he was sure, he would not forgive me. Perhaps he would kill me. *You know what he is.*"

The ending of the letter was passionate, and of that part of it Rodrigo took little heed or none. But of the other part and of certain additional directions in a postscript he pondered carefully.

There was no date to the letter, but that of the first post-mark was only one day earlier than the San Vito date, and the latter was not yet two days old. The first date was that of the previous Friday, it was now Monday morning. During the whole of the present week, therefore, "Arrigo" would be absent. He had no idea who Arrigo was (nor had Piccolo), though he had heard of Pipistrello, and had no suspicion that

they were the same person. He would have been a good deal surprised to know that the famous brigand was his enemy, and not less so if he had been aware of the reason. All her life Arrigo had worshipped Marotz and all his life Piccolo had inherited this adoration: yet neither had ever spoken to Pipistrello. The brigand knew, of course, that Rodrigo had married Marotz, and was the father of Piccolo, but he knew enough besides to make his odd worship of the mother and son a reason for hating the man who had, as he thought, ruined her life. Also he had connected Piccolo's moral collapse with his father's appearance, and fully believed that the boy had been kidnapped and led astray by him to revenge himself on the Principessa di Torre Marco. For some months now another cause of hatred had been bitterly growing in his steadily deepening suspicions.

Rodrigo had not the least doubt that if Piccolo knew of Ninfa's letter he would go to her: but he did not intend that he should know. That episode had better be complete in itself. On the other hand, he perceived that the girl was grossly imprudent, and he resolved to see her himself. It did not strike him as odd that the letter should have been addressed to "Don R. di Toledo," Piccolo's correct designation; but it was odd, for round San Vito and Torre Marco no one had thought of the boy by his father's surname, but spoke of him as Don Ruggiero di Torre Marco, or di San Vito. It was the merest chance that Ninfa's informant had given her Piccolo's legal name. It was a chance that helped to produce important consequences.

Since Piccolo had been with him Rodrigo had more

than once left home for a day or two, generally on business, for his country estates were large, and he did not neglect them, or trust their management to the intendente without supervision and control. On these occasions he simply told Piccolo that he was going away and would be returning soon. So he told him now, but this time he was wrong.

It was late on Tuesday evening when he reached the little hill-town where he had heard his son preach; the recollection of the preaching still annoyed him, but he thought of it with a grim smile. There was not much fear of anything of that sort to irritate him now. On the contrary, he began to see that he should have to use his influence presently on the side of restraint, if not morality, for he had quite recently perceived that Piccolo's naturally fine constitution was beginning to tell tales. The boy continued to grow rapidly and had the same broad shoulders and stalwart big frame, but he was becoming very thin, and at sixteen had the look of a dissipated young man of one-and-twenty.

The albergo was no better than it had been a year before, and the place was insufferably dull: there was nothing interesting about it, and nothing beautiful except its situation. Rodrigo had brought some books, but there are some places in which one cannot read, and he found it so here. After a very bad dinner there seemed no way at all of passing the time, and it was much too early to go to bed, even if the bed had been more inviting.

He had originally intended seeing Ninfa in the morning, but he was too impatient to wait, and he thought that he might as well go at once, and so be

able to get away early next day. It would not take more than an hour, he supposed, to reach her cottage, and it was only just eight o'clock; he could be back at the albergo by eleven.

He was already outside the *paese* as he arrived at this conclusion, and, having an excellent memory, he soon found the path up which he had followed Piccolo on the occasion of their first interview.

He was right as to the time it would take, and before nine he was at Ninfa's cottage, and, by good luck, as he thought, Ninfa herself was outside; she had been restless and impatient ever since writing to Piccolo, and had been continually creeping out to see if Piccolo was coming. She had no doubt he would come. In her arms she held her baby, now three months old.

She was cruelly disappointed that the strange gentleman who came along the path in the moonlight was not Piccolo; as far as she was capable of loving she had really fallen in love with the large-limbed, handsome lad. She had never cared for Pipistrello, who, in his fashion, sincerely cared for her. He was thirty years older than herself, and some women are always attracted by lovers younger than themselves.

Rodrigo told her at once who he was, and that he had come in consequence of her letter to his son.

"You say your child is his," he observed.

"Oh, yes. There is no doubt of that. It is unlucky that Arrigo should not believe it to be *his*: but I am sure he does not."

She was not herself aware how greatly her manner to Pipistrello had changed since the night of Piccolo's visit. But she knew she had been foolish in concealing her condition from him until he had noticed it

himself, and indeed until long after. Nor could she be aware that, while no one had seen Piccolo either take the path to her cottage, or descend by it, Rodrigo had been seen. From the station at Fiumara to the *paese* it had taken Toledo nearly two hours to drive in a wretched, lumbering vehicle, with two attenuated and venerable horses, and even that equipage it had been a work of time to find and engage.

Now Rodrigo had been seen getting out of the train, and by the same friend of Pipistrello who happened to have observed him take the path which led to Ninfa's cottage twelve months before. This same friend knew also that a letter from Ninfa had been posted, addressed to Don R. di Toledo.

Ninfa was proud of her baby, though rendered afraid by it, and she showed it now to her visitor."

"It is not at all like Arrigo," she whispered.

"Nor like my son," retorted Rodrigo promptly. Now this was perfectly true. Except that the child had eyes of the peculiar sapphire-blue, shading to hazel, that Piccolo had endowed it with, it was not like him. But in such a light as this the colour of the eyes was not apparent: what was apparent to Rodrigo was that the child had a considerable likeness to himself. Just as Piccolo in babyhood had resembled his grandfather and had never at all resembled his own father, so this child had again skipped a generation and was undeniably like its father's father. Rodrigo had very peculiar eyebrows, with a singular curve at the ends nearest to the temples, and the baby had reproduced them.

Arrigo had noticed this, just as the Duke noticed it now himself.

Rodrigo had not come all this way to see Ninfa out of curiosity. He had a plan to propose and he proposed it. As he did so he stood up close to her, and spoke in a low, persuasive tone: he knew that persuasion would be necessary. He pointed out the alternative, and was determined that she should understand how little choice she had. No one but Ninfa heard him, but some one else saw him.

The path was stony, with loose bits of broken rock, and it was hard to walk on it without noise. Nor could any one approach very near without risk of betraying his presence by the crackling of twigs, or rustle of trampled leaves. But from where Pipistrello stood Rodrigo and Ninfa were both very plainly visible, though the expression of their faces was not. Nevertheless, it was not difficult at that distance to understand that Rodrigo was persuading, with authority and determination.

Pipistrello had been suspicious for several months. During some weeks his suspicions had focussed on Rodrigo—since his comrade had perceived his jealous disturbance and had confirmed it by what he told. To-night he suspected no longer, he was sure. He was almost glad that of all men the culprit should be this man, whom he had always detested with a peculiar vicarious hatred. He told himself that he should be serving the Principessa di Torre Marco as well as himself, and he had always desired to serve her. Piccolo also would be benefited: for he told himself this miscreant had ruined his son, whose only hope of salvation lay in restoration to the mother from whom he had been, as Arrigo thought, stolen.

The utter moral collapse of the lad whose preaching

he had listened to with an odd mixture of personal admiration and half-sensuous exaltation had horrified him, and filled him with a new detestation of Rodrigo, and an added fury of compassion for his wife.

Now he had the final motive of personal injury.

We hear often of Fate's ironies, and surely it was one of them that, with so many sins of his own to answer for, Rodrigo should at last have paid the penalty of one he had never committed.

CHAPTER XIX

AFTER a night of double dissipation Piccolo awoke feverish and fatigued. He was no sluggard usually, but to-day he lay on in bed, with aching and heavy head, till the morning was far advanced. After a cup of coffee he fell asleep again, though his slumber was uneasy and unrestful.

At eleven o'clock a servant came to him and said a gentleman wished to see him. The matter was grave and important, might he come in at once? Piccolo sat up in bed, and looked at the card, on which the name *Principe di Positano* was engraved. Under it in pencil was written:

"Dear Piccolo—Do see me at once. Fabio di Maiori."

Possibly but for the written signature the lad might not have recognised by his title the name of his mother's old friend who had come to Torre Marco six years ago. As it was he flushed deeply, and sat silent for a moment.

"Excellency," said the servant gravely, "I think it is something very important. The Prince seemed disturbed."

"Let him come in then, Giacomo, only say I am not well."

The man went away, and almost immediately returned with Don Fabio.

"I have only been in Naples two days," he said, "and would not trouble you, but that it is so important."

Piccolo gazed at him, still hotly flushed; Don Fabio had not altered at all, but he knew how much he himself was changed. He remembered how the young man had kissed him—a thing his father had never done; but then he was older when his father met him, and looked almost a man. He remembered running down the hill-side to overtake him, as he rode away from Torre Marco, and how he had made him promise to come back.

"Anyway," said the lad, holding out his hand, "you promised you would come back."

He smiled as he spoke, but not very comfortably. No doubt, even in two days at Naples, his mother's friend would have heard how he spent his time. Somehow it never occurred to him that Don Fabio would regard his life from the same point of view as his own father did.

"Yes, Piccolo. I said I would come back. But I never thought it would be as a messenger of evil."

He spoke as affectionately as ever; the lad noticed that, even as he started at the ill-omened words and solemn tone.

"Is my mother ill?" Piccolo gasped, staring with a horrified expression at the young man's compassionate sad face. What if she were dying, what if she were dead! He knew now that if she were dead it would be he, he himself, who had killed her.

"No, my poor boy, she is not ill; there is no bad

news of her. But there is bad news that will be terrible for her as well as you."

"My father? He went away on Monday on some business. Is he ill? Has there been some accident? He is never ill."

"Yes, Piccolo. It is cruel to tell you, but it would be more cruel to leave you to learn it from the public telegrams and newspapers. There has been an accident."

He paused, still holding the lad's hot hand, his kind eyes fixed on the lad's beautiful spoiled face. How well he remembered the full, curved lips that might always have betrayed some evil prophecy, and the wonderful deep eyes that seemed now less deep, and were not restless and uneasy then; the exquisite expression that was interrupted and abased.

"What was the accident?" Piccolo whispered.

"You must know so soon that it is least cruel to tell you at once——"

"Don Fabio! Is he dead?"

"Piccolo, Piccolo!"

Yes, no words could have said "Yes" more sadly and more plainly. The young man rose and sat beside him, on the bed, with a kindly arm passed behind his shoulders as the lad bowed himself and wept.

Presently he lifted his head and begged to be told all fully.

"Piccolo, it is worse even than death, ordinary death. It would be utterly unfit that you should know but that you must know. The papers will be full of it, and there is no possibility of your not hearing it. Alas! your mother will hear it too."

"Tell me." The lad turned and fastened his horrified eyes upon Fabio, and he told him.

"He was shot on purpose, by a man who was jealous of him."

Piccolo shuddered: alas, there was nothing incredible in such news.

"The man was so notorious that the crime will be all the more spoken about. He is called Pipistrello, a brigand."

To Piccolo this conveyed nothing; he too had heard of Pipistrello, but had no idea that Arrigo and he were the same.

"Where did it happen?"

"In the woods above Rocca Secca in Sicily" (Piccolo started, and his flush faded to deathly whiteness); "close to the house of a girl called Ninfa. . . ."

"Go on," the lad urged, huskily.

"He and the girl were together. Outside in the wood, and the girl had her baby in her arms. It was born three months ago, and though she lived with the man Pipistrello, the child, he found out, was not his. It seems she had written to your father, and some friend of this man Arrigo, whom they call Pipistrello, found out such a letter had gone, and warned him; he and his friends were on the lookout. Then your father was seen to arrive at the station of Fiumara, and word was sent to Pipistrello immediately. After dinner at the albergo in the *paese*, your father went off through the woods, to the house of the girl Ninfa."

"How do you know all this?"

"There is a long telegram in the *Messagero*, in a second edition that came out an hour ago. I came

here at once, and found your servants had just heard; they were afraid to tell you."

"Do you know more?"

"Yes. The brigand saw them together, talking earnestly. He saw the girl show her child to your father, and then, for some time, your father was trying to persuade her to something; then the man fired twice; whether he intended to kill both no one can know. But he fired two shots almost together; the first killed your father instantly, the second went through their child's heart into its mother's, and killed them also."

Piccolo uttered a terrible cry: three people had died for his fault.

"*Their* child, you say! Did this man, Arrigo, think it was my father's child?"

"My poor boy, that was the whole motive of the crime. I told you."

"Don Fabio, Don Fabio!"

"My poor Piccolo. . . ."

"Don Fabio, I have no doubt, I am sure, it was *mine*. I was its father. That was my first sin. A year ago: on the night I first met my father. I am certain he never saw the girl till—till he went to her because she had written to me. I never knew she had written. But our names are nearly the same, and he may have opened the letter by mistake, then determined to go and see if what she said was true. On the night we first met he followed me up the path from Rocca Secca towards Ninfa's house. But he did not go so far: he overtook me and we sat and talked. Then he went back to the *paese* and I presently went on. After a while I came to this girl's

house and she gave me supper. Then I stayed with her all night, and quite early next day my father and I both went away to Catania and Palermo, and so here."

He dropped Fabio's hand and sat upright, his gaze directed straight before him, in a terrible moaning silence. Outside, the mid-day Ave Maria was beginning to ring from all the churches before he spoke again.

"How does the paper know all this?"

"After this crime Pipistrello ran to the house where the girl had lived with him. They kept an old servant, and she had heard the shots and was frightened. He told her what had happened and helped her to bring in the body of the girl Ninfa and her child. He swore he had not meant to kill her, though he said she deserved it. He declared that the second shot was an accident. Then he made off into the woods. The old woman was afraid to stay all night alone there and scrambled down to the *paese*. She said she knew the man had been jealous for many months, and had been less and less at the cottage."

"Have they taken him?"

"No. It will be hard to do so. You know what Sicily is and the Maffia. And he had plenty of money, they say. He may get away altogether. There are so many ships and boats leaving the big and even the little Sicilian ports every day——"

Piccolo sighed miserably.

"Whether they take him or not can make no difference. *They* are dead."

He sat staring hopelessly before him. Nothing could make any difference.

"Piccolo," said Fabio, taking his clasped hands into his, and holding them tenderly. "The past is no longer ours. Alas, my dear, alas! Once flung away we cannot pick it up again. The pearls we have cast to the swine cannot all be gathered up and washed. Nor, alas, can all our repentance change the results of what we have done amiss. But——"

"Fabio, do I not know it! To repent! That seems only to think of myself. Fifty years of repentance won't make those three alive again."

"No, *poveretto*. But there is some one else. There is your mother."

He paused, almost undecided. Whither ought the lad to go: to her, or to gather up the dishonoured remnant of his father?

"You must go to her. Now, at once. And then to him. To him I will go first. To Sicily we will go together. At Catania we must separate, you to go first to your mother, I to go at once to Rocca Secca. I will bring him back here or to any place you decide; wherever it is, you can meet me there."

There were, in fact, telegrams for the lad already waiting, and now they were brought to him. The old Duchess of Revigliano was dead, and his father's sister, the ambassadress, was far from Italy in St. Petersburg; he must act alone. In all that, at least, Fabio could help him. And he did. In only one thing was Fabio's treatment of him like his father's: he, too, but unconsciously, treated the lad more than twenty years younger than himself almost as if they were of an age. It did not occur to either of them that this was largely due to the evil precocity of

Piccolo's life for the past year. But no doubt it was : and but for that Fabio could scarcely have told his story of the crime at Rocca Secca at all. Alas! directly he saw him he realised that it would contain nothing which he could not, at least, understand.

CHAPTER XX

PICCOLO was now seventeen. His father had been dead a year, during the whole of which he had remained with his mother at Torre Marco.

As soon as possible Rodrigo's body had been removed from Rocca Secca, and they had taken it to San Vito, where it was buried in the Campo Santo where he had found Marotz eighteen years before, and told her that it was the living who needed her. A plain marble cross was set upon the grave, with the dead man's name and title, and the dates of his birth and death, but no allusion to his marriage.

There could be no doubt that his father's death had saved Piccolo. For a long time his horror and melancholy were too great for any other effort than that of unwearying thoughtfulness for Marotz. But his nature was too buoyant for permanent sadness, or despair, and all Fabio's endeavour had been to make the unhappy youth look rather forward than to what was so irrevocably past.

And in time his earnest, though grave, encouragement began to bear fruit, though he himself was not there to see it. Though he longed to be with Marotz too, he felt that it was not possible for a time, and he went his way for a while, commending her solemnly to her son.

"There is no one now to divide your love for her with," he said; "let her have it all."

"Fabio," the lad answered, "during this last year my love was divided, and part of her share was given away from her. That I should love my father was natural: but, in my feeling for him, was one like anger towards her. You will find it hard to forgive that."

"I find it hard to understand it," the young man answered coldly.

"Yes. I knew it would make you angry. But one must tell the truth. It seemed to me that she had been hard to him. Every one cannot be like her."

"No one can be like her, Piccolo. But . . ."

He paused: how could he speak of the dead if "one must tell the truth"?

Presently Piccolo said quietly:

"You know all about what was amiss—what had divided them?"

"Do *you* know?"

"He told me."

"And she?"

"She never told me anything. After you came that time to Torre Marco I had an idea, and I asked her if she was a widow, and she said 'No.' She never mentioned him further, except when I asked if my father were like you, and she again answered simply, 'No.'"

"Piccolo, what did he tell you?"

The youth told him and his friend sighed as he said:

"One must be just to the living, as well as respectful to the dead. Shall I tell you the whole story, so that you may cease to misunderstand her?"

Then he told him.

All this was a year ago. But Piccolo daily kept it in his mind, and by his encircling tenderness strove to make up for the disloyalty to his mother of which he knew he had been guilty.

Gradually Marotz became happy, and the old, extraordinary life of peaceful isolation seemed destined to go on for ever.

Ancilla was more devoted to them both than ever, and I am afraid that the big youth's year of dissipation by no means disfigured him in her eyes. Into his the old, happy expression was returning, and the unmistakable signs of illness and fatigue had left his face.

Nevertheless Ancilla had her preoccupations, and so had he. For two years Marotz had never been to the sacraments, though more than ever devout in attendance at Mass. Of what had taken place during his year of absence Piccolo knew nothing, but he could not help noticing now that his mother never went to Communion. Of course others noticed it too, and at last the Bishop was told. He came to Torre Marco, and, with the *parocco*, called at the castello to pay his respects to its mistress.

"May I see your Excellency's garden, of which Don Sebastiano has told me so much?" he inquired, and she at once led him out into it.

"I," said Don Sebastiano, "have seen the garden many times; but have not seen Don Ruggiero's new horse."

So he and Piccolo went off to the stables, and Marotz perceived that the Bishop had something to say to her.

They walked leisurely through the marbled alleys and at first spoke only of indifferent things.

"Your son," said the old prelate, "looks as old as you! One would say you were brother and sister."

Marotz laughed.

"Excellency, he is only seventeen. I am more than thirty-five: almost an old woman."

The Bishop laughed too. She certainly was not an old woman: any one would have said she was six or seven and twenty.

"Don Sebastiano tells me that your son only made his first Communion a year ago."

"Did he tell you anything else?"

"Yes; he could hardly help it. He asked me to confirm Don Ruggiero; and of course I was surprised, and I questioned him. That was how I learned the young man only made his first Communion the other day. Certainly I was puzzled. This is my first visit to Torre Marco; I have only been bishop eighteen months. But I have always lived in this diocese, and I had heard often of you."

He paused and she said nothing, so he continued in his kind and fatherly manner. He was an old man, with a comfortable, benevolent face and pleasant voice.

"My dear child, I am like a grandfather compared to you. You must not be offended if I speak straight out. They say you are so good to them all, and so good in yourself. And I know both are true."

"Excellency, I am not good."

"Well, well! The people are easily deceived, and they think you are good. So do I, who am just one of them. My child, I know of your sorrows, and how you have borne them, letting them teach you more compassion for the troubles and wants of others. So

I could not understand how you, so frequent and so devout in attendance on the duties of religion, could let your only son grow almost into a man without them. And now that he at last goes to the sacraments you neglect them. Can it be that some of the evil contagion of these faithless times has attacked your faith?"

"Oh, no," she said simply, wondering how to answer him.

"Will you tell me in confession?"

"I cannot go to confession."

"Cannot!"

"I have no right."

She paused again, and then resolved to tell him all. It was a long story, but it was finished at last, and the old Bishop hardly knew whether to laugh or cry. To him theology came first, and the theological absurdity of her idea quite upset him; but the sadness of it all was not lost on him, and his good old heart was touched and full of sympathy. What struck him most was how lonely this woman's life had always been, in spite of loving and devoted parents and son and relations.

"My poor little child," he said, "and you never knew that what you tried to do was simply impossible!"

"You mean that God would not let my child be born without a soul?"

"Certainly He would not. But your child already had a soul when you chose for him that he should be born without one. The soul is co-existent with the body from its first inception. Doctors will explain to you that the embryo is there from the first instant

of conception, and in that instant the soul is joined to it. That is why our Church holds it so great a crime to destroy the unborn, no matter how early the stage. Your son had his own soul from the beginning, and did not need yours, even if you could have given him yours."

CHAPTER XXI

THE Bishop had gone away. Piccolo had been confirmed in the little chapel of the castle, and Marotz no longer puzzled her people by abstaining from the sacraments. She was gently happy with her son and his love: but she sometimes wondered how it would be when he should come to her one day and tell her of another love of his, and presently give her a daughter with a difficult new claim upon her motherhood.

Piccolo's own thoughts were quite differently occupied. He was not thinking of falling in love, though the subject of love was a good deal in his mind. He was not at all tired of Torre Marco, but he had an intense desire to travel far and see the world. Nevertheless he would not speak to her yet of this wish of hers. He was determined not to leave her again alone.

One day he abruptly said:

"I want to invite a friend here. You do not mind?"

Certainly she did not mind; but he could perceive that she wondered what his friend might be like.

"Oh," he said, laughing, "I had not all bad friends at Naples. This one was *really* kind to me there. You need not suspect him. He is as good as possible. You wait and see."

"Very well, I will," and she laughed too; "several very good persons live in Naples, I dare say."

Presently she inquired if he had any name, as Piccolo had not honoured him with one.

"Certainly he has. Several names and several titles. Massimo is one of his names. Since you do not object I will write to him."

"Unless he is very fond of you he will, I am afraid, find it rather dull here. There is nothing to do, and Neapolitans are not fond of being dull."

"Oh, he won't be dull. He is devoted to me."

Marotz laughed at his conceit, but was really glad to think of his having a companion of his own age.

Piccolo did write:

"DEAR FABIO,

"It takes you a long while to keep a promise. When I was ten years old you promised to come back to Torre Marco, and now I am seventeen? Every one says I look four-and-twenty, which naturally makes it seem longer. Will you, please, come now? I want to go abroad, and travel, and you know all about it, so come and tell me. Unless you come I shall not know whether Pekin is on the way to Paris, or St. Petersburg farther off than Prague. I shall expect you to come at once, but you may as well tell me what day to be waiting for you on the hill where we said good-bye seven years ago. I need not stand on the wall to talk to you now. I am always, your affectionate friend,

"RUGGIERO DI TOLEDO."

At the end of a week came a telegram from London saying, "Meet me on Thursday."

This was Monday, and four more days seemed a long while to Piccolo's impatience. But he whistled them away at last, and quite early on Thursday morning he went down the road to the old place he so well remembered, and sat down on the wall to wait. He had sent a groom with two horses to the station three hours before, also a carriage for the luggage.

It was not eleven o'clock yet, and the morning was fresh and cool. The summer heats were over, but the beauty of autumn was at its best.

"It does all look perfect," he said to himself; "still I should like to see other places, even though none should be more beautiful. If I am wrong she shall come too. All the same I am not wrong."

He sat so still that the lizards came out and ran along the wall, and he watched one of them carelessly. At last the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard below upon the zigzagging road, and he turned to look down; there was Mazio the groom, and Fabio Massimo di Maiori a little in front.

It was hard to wait where he was, but he was determined that they should meet again, this time, on the very place where they had parted, and sat as still as he could for a moment or two, then jumped down on to the road, walked up and down, and jumped back to his place upon the wall. The lizards had long ago retreated, much scandalised.

At last they did really come in sight, round the corner of the road, and Piccolo looked the other way, pretending not to have heard them. He picked out a loose stone from the wall and aimed it deliberately at some supposititious mark: then stared after it as if absorbed in seeing whether his bullet had found its

billet. But now the horses were close to, and he had to turn and look. His whole body expressed welcome.

"Walk the horses up slowly to the palazzo," he said to Mazio. "The Prince will walk up with me."

Fabio leapt down, Piccolo watching him as if his every movement was significant and interesting, and the man took both horses away up the steep road. Till he had gone they hardly spoke, but stood looking at each other sideways, each leaning back against the wall and half smiling.

"You have come back at last," said Piccolo, taking hold of Fabio's left hand with his right.

"I could not help it. You told me to."

"Do you remember our saying good-bye here?"

"Not a bit!" replied the young man, laughing.

Piccolo dropped his hand impatiently, and said nothing further. He was a very impatient youth, and it annoyed him that Fabio should laugh. He almost wished he had not sent for him.

His companion saw it all, and his smile deepened into a look that was exquisitely tender and sympathising.

"Dear Piccolo," he said, moving away from the wall to face him closely; "one can never fail to remember some things. All my life I shall never forget the picture I have had ever since in my mind of this bit of wall, and the mountain over there, and the beautiful, dear boy asking for my willing promise to come back."

"Did you like me?" cried Piccolo, in an abrupt parenthesis. Whoever he was thinking of, he must think of himself with them.

Fabio nodded with unmistakable affirmation.

"For my own sake?"

"Yes. For your own sake."

"But if I had been very ugly, or vulgar, or disagreeable——"

"You *could* n't have been."

"Oh, but if I had? Don't interrupt so. Should you have liked me still?"

"Yes, Piccolo."

"For my own sake?"

"No, Piccolo. Not if you had been so repulsive as you describe. How could I?"

"Anyway you've come back," the lad observed inconsequently.

"Yes! I always meant to—if I could. I told you that it might be impossible. You could not understand, then, why."

"No, but I think, even then, I understood partly why you had come, and why you went away again."

For a moment they only looked at each other in silence, Fabio wondering, as he had often wondered, how Piccolo and Marotz could each be so beautiful, and each so utterly unlike one another.

"Fabio!"

"Well, Piccolo."

"Shall you go away again this time?"

Again the young man seemed inclined to laugh, and again Piccolo was getting ready to frown and part.

"Not unless you send me. You see I am your guest this time. Last time I was uninvited."

"I shall not send you away. Though perhaps I may go away myself for a good while. I want to travel."

"You mean that you invite me to prolong my visit indefinitely?"

"No, definitely."

"For how long then?"

"For ever. Till you die."

"And your mother?"

"Go and ask her if she minds."

He could say no more. Neither of them had been able to say much those last few moments: that was why they used such snapping little short sentences.

CHAPTER XXII

PICCOLO turned away, and Fabio walked on to the castello. The boy clambered over the wall by the road-side and disappeared among the tangled bushes that clung to the hill-side. The man kept to the road, for he did not feel he could say what was in his mind quite immediately.

In quarter of an hour he was at the castle, and, hearing that Marotz was in her garden, he followed her thither. She had been there all the morning.

At first he could not find her. The garden was big and she was far from the house. But he saw her before she saw him. He stood still to look at her, and told himself it was incredible she should be only two years younger than himself, incredible that it should be eighteen years and more since they had danced at the court ball. What did it matter? Time had only given to her, he had stolen nothing.

When she saw him she came forward, recognising him at once.

"How did you come?" she asked, echoing the question with which she had greeted him half-a-dozen years before.

He laughed.

"Just as I came last time; except that the horse I rode up on belongs to you or Piccolo. And this time I was invited.

"Oh, so *you* are Piccolo's friend. How silly he is. He has been mystifying me for a week. He said he wanted to invite a friend who was as good as possible——"

"That need not have mystified you. So I am."

"And he only said his friend's name was Massimo."

"So it is. Fabio Massimo. We pretend in our family that Fabius Maximus was our ancestor."

"As you are Piccolo's guest, I think it would be more civil if he were here to welcome you."

"Oh, he *has* welcomed me. He was most hospitable."

He paused, and in his tone there was already something peculiar.

"Come and sit down," he suggested. "*You* are not so hospitable as Piccolo, for you do not even offer me a seat."

They easily found one, and took their places, not in silence, but each thinking of something other than their words.

"Do you remember my other visit here?" he asked at last, determined to get to his subject even if he must get at it abruptly.

Certainly she remembered.

"Piccolo was charming that day," he observed.

"Yes, I remember. You and he made a great deal of each other." She was going to add that she remembered they had kissed each other; but changed her mind.

"After I had gone away he ran down the hill-side by a short cut and overtook me."

"Piccolo is always taking short cuts," she remarked.

"An excellent habit, which saves time as well as trouble."

"Provided one arrives where one intended. Sometimes short cuts——"

"Excuse my interrupting. But I don't want to talk about short cuts."

"Oh, certainly; only you introduced them."

"Yes, and I am going to make one. As I remarked before, Piccolo was charming that afternoon. He ran after me expressly to insist that I should come back."

"Evidently to no purpose."

"Not at all. Here I am. I told him I fully intended to return if ever I should be able. Now I am able."

He got up and stood before her, bareheaded, as he had done that other time, half-a-dozen years before. It seemed to him now but one interrupted interview. She lifted her exquisite face to his, and her sombre, fathomless eyes did not shrink from his, but met them as one tide may meet another that a great rock has divided.

"Marotz."

He had never called her by her name before, and she barely noticed it.

"Marotz, he knew even then why I went away, and he knows now why I have come back. He wants me to stay. Shall I? I am sure it would be useless to ask you, if he did not wish me to."

She, too, arose and stood beside him, but could not easily speak. It seemed impossible that life, which had gone on so long, should be but now beginning; that for her also there should be a second spring.

The sunlight was blinding, after the long shadow of her days. Her sorrows had been so deep that such joy as she had known had lain ever far beneath them: it seemed incredible that for her, too, joy was rising to the surface, to bear her on its flood beyond the sharp reef of pain.

"Fabio, need I say anything?"

"Only that I need not go away this time. That you, too, bid me stay."

Even that she could not say. But her noble beauty was shining with a glow that did not seem inhospitable.

"I know nothing of love," she said presently. "You must teach me."

"Nothing of love! You! Why, Marotz, you have lived always in it, as a fish lives in the sea."

But then a fish knows nothing of the sea.

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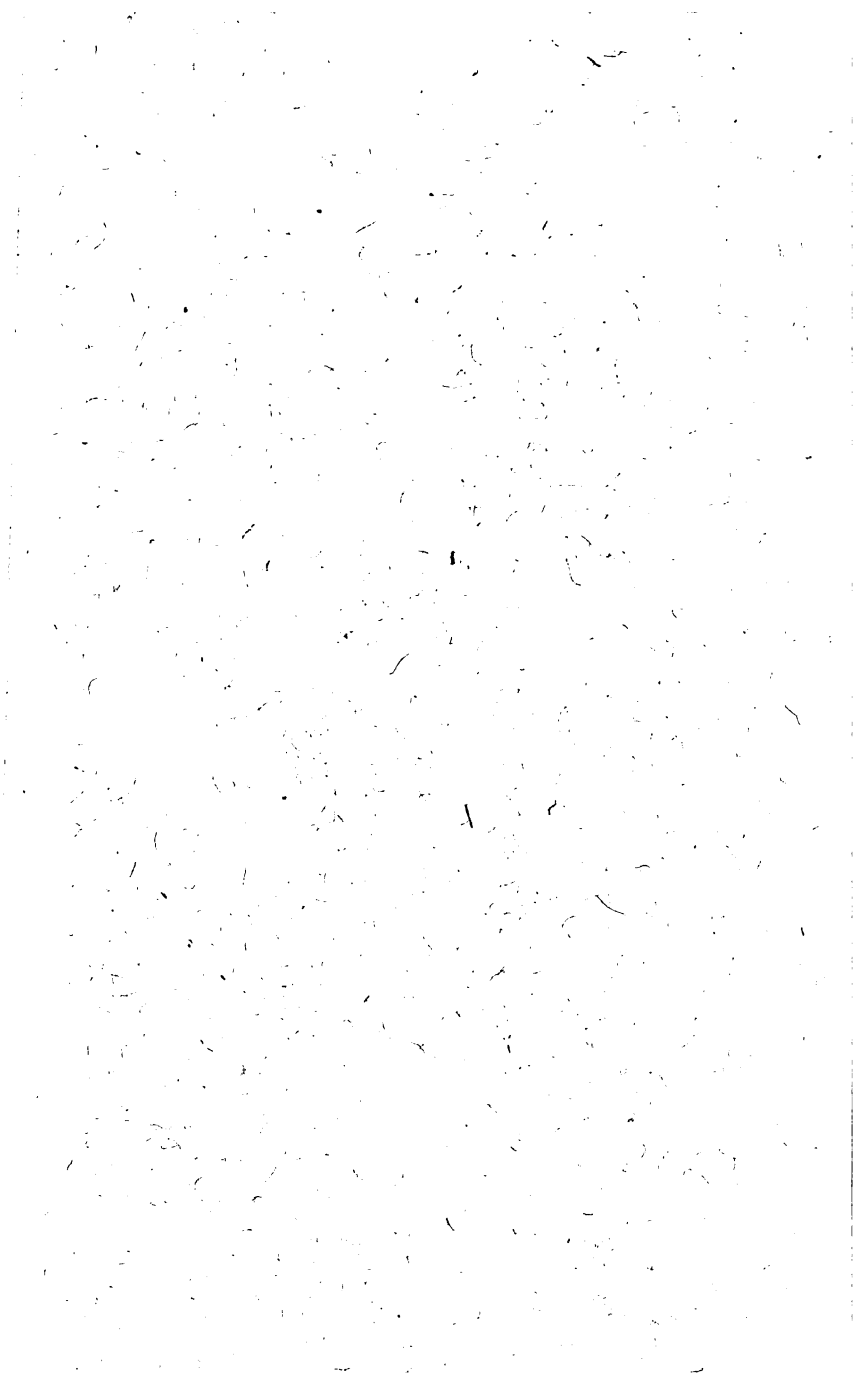
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